Miseducating Teachers about the Poor: A Critical Analysis of Ruby Payne's Claims about Poverty

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Background/Context: *This is the first research study to examine the content basis of Payne's in-service teacher education program, A Framework for Understanding Poverty, though others who have reviewed the book have agreed with our analysis. The study took place within a policy context in which the federal government, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), created a new category of students (economically disadvantaged) whose test scores would be monitored by officials in the U. S. Department of Education. This law ensures that the improvement of poor children's test scores becomes a major concern of every public school in the country. These federal requirements have fueled the demand for professional development programs such as that offered by Ruby Payne and her Aha! Process, Inc.*
Purpose: *This article reports on an examination of the content of Ruby Payne's professional development offerings, as represented in A Framework for Understanding Poverty. Given the immense popularity of the program, an assessment of its representations of poor people is warranted and significant. We analyzed the relationship between Payne's claims and the*

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existing research about low-income individuals and families. This study of Payne's work provides administrators and teachers with an evaluation of the reliability of Payne's claims. It also provides scholars in education, anthropology, sociology, and related fields with a description and critique of one of the more common conversations that is engaging teachers about the nature of the lives of many of their students, and the struggle to identify directions in which to improve schooling for the most vulnerable students in the education system.
***Research Design**: This is a qualitative research study whose data were derived from an analysis of A Framework for Understanding Poverty.*
***Conclusions/Recommendations**: Our critical analysis of Payne's characterizations of people living in poverty indicates that her work represents a classic example of what has been identified as deficit thinking. We found that her truth claims, offered without any supporting evidence, are contradicted by anthropological, sociological and other research on poverty. We have demonstrated through our analysis that teachers may be misinformed by Payne's claims. As a consequence of low teacher expectations, poor students are more likely to be in lower tracks or lower ability groups and their educational experience more often dominated by rote drill and practice.*

When the US Congress determined that economically disadvantaged students would be a subgroup whose test scores would contribute to a school's "adequate yearly progress" (No Child Left Behind, 2002), they made a claim about reality. They claimed that poor children are members of a legitimate category and that those children share features that are related to their experience in school. The making of the category *children of poverty* and the positioning of the people within that category as problems for the education system certainly is not new (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Katz, 1990, 1995; Patterson, 2000; Title I, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). However, the federal law makes sure that the improvement of poor childrens' test scores becomes a major focus of every school in the country.

What happens when a category of student is constructed, through language, as a uniform group in need of improvement? How can administrators and teachers cope with such a demand as that which Congress has placed on them? A category has been created, and along with it, a charge to change the members of that category. Schools look for help. Principals and superintendents ask their neighboring counterparts for advice. The easiest answer is to bring in a program, especially one that will not overly drain already depleted budgets, one that does not ask too much of already overworked teachers. An affordable program is identified, and its language begins to form ways of thinking for the teachers in their interactions with the children from the identified group. The program's language creates representations (Holquist, 1997; Mehan, 1993; Rabinow, 1986; Said, 1979), frames for thinking about "these kids." Policy occa-

sions conceptual and linguistic representations of people, and then it moves those linguistic representations into material school buildings. What at first seems like so many words has real effects on human beings.

Federal requirements to raise the test scores of children from economically disadvantaged families have fueled the demand for professional development such as that offered by Aha! Process, Inc., and its founder, Ruby K. Payne. Payne's professional development offerings are immensely popular with school districts. In her work, Payne discusses differences among students who come from poverty, middle class, and wealthy backgrounds, and she makes recommendations about how teachers can better educate children from poverty. We have confirmed that the program is central to district professional development offerings in thirty-eight states. Suburban districts such as Orange County in California require teachers to attend the program, as do Native American tribal schools, urban districts such as Buffalo, and many rural districts. Several Canadian provinces have used Payne's work, and she has spoken a number of times in Australia. One of Payne's books, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005), was recently number 360 on Amazon's sales rankings (an unusually high rank for a book about education; Amazon.com, September 14, 2005), and the book cover states that the volume has sold more than 800,000 copies. It has been translated into Spanish as *Un Marco Para Entender La Pobreza*. Because many educators who work with vulnerable populations are exposed to Payne's writings in two-day workshops based upon the book, an assessment of the quality of her claims is of educational and ethical significance. This article reports a systematic examination of the content of Ruby Payne's professional development offerings, as represented in *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Ours is the first study to examine the content basis of Payne's in-service teacher education program, though others who have reviewed the book have been in accord with our analysis (see Gorski, 2006; Ng & Rury, 2006; Osei-Kofi, 2005) in viewing Payne's work as unsubstantiated and built upon a deficit perspective. Payne's text paints a portrait of economically disadvantaged people, a portrait many teachers are using to inform their relationships to students. We wanted to analyze whether this representation was accurate, fair, and likely to have advantageous consequences for students. We systematically analyzed the relationship between Payne's claims and some of the existing research about individuals, families, and communities that could be described as "in poverty." This analysis provides district and school administrators and teachers with an evaluation of the reliability of Payne's claims and the beginnings of an alternative perspective from which to consider the lives of students from poor families. At the same time, it provides scholars in education,

anthropology, sociology, and related fields a description and critique of one of the more common conversations engaging teachers about the nature of the lives of many of their students and the struggle to identify directions in which to improve schooling for the most vulnerable students in the education system.

When we first became acquainted with Payne's work, it seemed to us that her "framework" included negative stereotypes that drew from a longstanding US tradition of viewing the poor from a deficit perspective. If that is the case, many schools and teachers may be reinforcing ways of thinking and talking about children in poverty that are false, prejudiced, or at the very least, limited. In her book, Payne refers to her claims as "data" (1; page references to *Framework* are in parentheses), although she has conducted no actual research. She cites few sources, and when she does cite, the source is often not a research study or does not say what she says it does. We have a broad view of research and acknowledge many valid ways of knowing that are not research. But claims to have data and research to support generalizations about a population should be possible to confirm. Schools are, after all, academic communities, and one should apply at least minimal standards of academic convention to information and perspective exchanged among education professionals. Furthermore, Payne does not write as a practitioner, embedding her claims in narratives of her own practice. She writes in generalities, as if her claims were founded upon research data.

In an era in which there are calls for teaching to be scientifically-based or evidence-based, we wish to make a distinction. We are not persuaded that research can prove a particular instructional intervention or system to be best for all populations in all situations, and so we do not intend to subject the instructional strategies Payne recommends to that kind of scrutiny. However, educators should have accurate, evidence-based pictures of what their students' lives are like, what competencies and understandings they might bring to school if school were ready to receive them, and what social and cultural contexts have a bearing upon the interactions that occur in classrooms. Since much of Payne's book is concerned with just such questions, it is appropriate to apply rigorous standards of research and evidence. Attempts to describe reality, especially the reality of the lives of a vulnerable population such as poor children, should be based on careful study and accurate evidence, and they should take into account the perspectives of the people of whom they speak. Our research questions, therefore, were these: What patterns are detectable in Ruby Payne's truth claims about children's lives in poverty? To what extent are those truth claims supported by existing research?

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Teachers who had been through the Ruby Payne workshops at their schools, including two of the authors, confirmed that *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* provided the central content of the professional development program, so we determined that we would take that book as our data corpus. We did not simply read and review the book, however, because we wanted to examine the text's claims more closely and systematically. We treated the book as qualitative data, moving through it sentence by sentence in order to extract propositional content from individual truth claims.

We limited our attention to language that made specific claims about reality, ignoring speculative comments such as those about things "schools can do." Many sentences contained a single truth claim, such as "Often the attitude in generational poverty is that society owes one a living" (47). Other sentences contained multiple truth claims, such as "The use of formal register, on the other hand, allows one to score well on tests and do well in school and higher education" (28). We recorded three truth claims from that sentence, that "The use of formal register allows one to score well on tests;" "The use of formal register allows one to do well in school;" and "The use of formal register allows one to do well in higher education." In order to construct explicit truth claims in many cases, we had to rely on text cohesion to put pronouns with antecedents and otherwise reassemble meanings that had been distributed among sentences.

Many times, truth claims were not directly stated in the text, and they had to be inferred. For example, Payne has a quiz in the book, called "Could you survive in poverty?" which consists of a checklist whereby the reader can self-assess whether they have knowledge and characteristics Payne deems necessary for survival in poverty. One item on this list, for example, is "I know which grocery stores' garbage bins can be accessed for thrown-away food." We recorded this as a truth claim that, "In order to survive in poverty, one must know which grocery stores' garbage bins can be accessed for thrown-away food" (38). In our judgment, the language here was categorical enough to warrant being identified as a truth claim. There were borderline cases where we did not take the language as containing propositional content. For example, Payne provides nine fictional scenarios or case studies. Though these are clearly intended to be taken as paradigmatic cases of people living in poverty, we did not interpret truth claims from them, because interpreting narratives would have involved a different analytic method than the one we used in the rest of the book. We also did not take as truth claims Payne's accounts of

others' theoretical frameworks that did not relate to poverty or social class.

In all, we extracted 607 truth claims, which we entered into a database program called Tinderbox (Eastgate Systems, 2005). We chose this program because it allowed flexibility in coding and grouping the data and permitted us to view our data as an outline, a map, a tree diagram, or as a hierarchy. Such multi-modal flexibility facilitated category development. We coded each truth claim, remaining for first-level codes as close as possible to the language of the book. We almost always assigned more than one code to a truth claim and sometimes assigned as many as seven, with the rule being that we should tag as much of its propositional content as possible. As our list of codes grew, we employed established codes as often as possible. By the time we finished coding all the data, we had identified 102 codes. We collapsed these codes into fifteen categories, and then further collapsed them to four super-ordinate categories: *social*

Table 1

Super-ordinate category	Category	Code	Truth claims: *n* =
Immediate environment of poor children	Families	Communication	6
		Divorce	2
		Family	21
		Home	38
		Men	30
		Mothers	5
		Parent income	3
		Parents	6
		Punishment	14
		Women	5
	Resources	Relationships	106
		Resources	70
		Support structure	20
	Material Dailiness	Entertainment	9
		Disorganization	21
		Health	14
		Materials	12
		Money	31
		Noise	3
		Property	7
		Trade	21
		Transportation	2
		Work	21

structures, *daily life*, *language*, and *characteristics of individuals*. These categories serve to structure our findings. Table 1 illustrates how one of the super-ordinate categories can be broken down. In the pages to follow, we outline key claims in each of the above four major categories, comparing Payne's claims to existing research evidence as we go. After that, we provide a discussion of our findings across the categories and the significance of those findings.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES

To write about large sociological concepts such as social class and poverty, one must develop definitions of some notoriously difficult terms. In this section, we analyze Payne's conceptions of class and poverty, as well as her treatment of race and gender and her crucial construct of "hidden rules" that define class membership. Categories for this section were "class," which included seven codes drawn from 389 truth claims, and "larger social structures," which contained seven codes and 53 truth claims. By "larger social structures," we refer to social realities beyond the everyday, material circumstances we deal with in another section, and in this category, we included codes for social categories such as race as well as bureaucratic/governmental categories such as immigration.

Class

Payne asserts that there are three socioeconomic classes: the poor, the middle class, and the wealthy (3, 42-43). She does not elaborate further on this thinking, nor does she offer an explanation of how these three classes relate to one another or how each of the classes may encompass varying types of socioeconomic status. In Payne's world, most people are middle class, the poor make up about 12% of the population, and a smaller percentage (she estimates about 6%) are wealthy (2). Contrary to Payne's neat division, many scholars who have done work in social class have discussed multiple classes and substrata within those as comprising the class structure in the US (Bendix & Lipset, 1966; Brantlinger, 2003; Compton, 1998; Foley, 1997; Giddens, 1973; Gilbert, 2003; Grusky, 2001). For example, sociologist Dennis Gilbert provides a class analysis of the US in which approximately 12% are "underclass," 13% are working poor, 30% of the population is categorized as working class, another 30% are middle class, 14% are in the upper middle class, and 1% are considered capitalist class. Significantly, Payne's claim that there are three classes does not account for about 40% of the US population, those traditionally viewed as working class (Gilbert, 2003). We do not know of a single soci-

ologist who claims that there are exactly three classes in the USA (Bendix & Lipset, 1966; Brantlinger, 2003; Compton, 1998; Foley, 1997; Giddens, 1973; Gilbert, 2003; Grusky, 2001).

Poverty

Payne categorizes people as being in poverty regardless of whether their incomes are below the poverty line; rather, Payne suggests that the "poverty" category applies to anyone who carries the "mindset" of the "poverty culture" (61). Payne states that, while the income of an individual may increase, "patterns of thought, social interaction, cognitive strategies, etc., remain" (3). Students from households with incomes above the poverty line still may exhibit behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that Payne claims are associated with those from poverty. Payne argues that, though financial resources are important, they do not "explain the differences in the success with which "individuals leave poverty nor the reasons that many stay in poverty," (8) and that "the ability to leave poverty is more dependent upon other resources" (8) than financial ones (see Resources, below). However, the word "poverty" is not a metaphor here, and by definition, it means lack of money. It is a material condition, not an ethical or behavioral one, but Payne's claims obscure this self-evident fact. This is important to note because contrary to Payne's assertions, one "leaves poverty" when one has obtained sufficient financial resources. As we shall see, defining poverty to mean something other than material disadvantage is the crux of Payne's case.

Culture of poverty

Payne describes the poor as a homogenous group, with the same ways of using language, interacting with others, and employing strategies to survive in the "culture of poverty" (27-28, 38, 41-42, 44-45, 51, 54-59). This notion of a culture of poverty permits Payne to view the poor as belonging to a single category. The quoted source for Payne's use of "culture of poverty" is an excerpt from Oscar Lewis's 1961 book *The Children of Sanchez,* an ethnography of a poor neighborhood in Mexico City. The concept of *the culture of poverty*, in brief, is that poor people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or geographical location, all live within a definable culture. This culture includes a self-perpetuating dynamic in which a poor individual re-creates his/her social position as a member of a family so that subsequent generations remain "in poverty." The concept was controversial almost as soon as Lewis introduced it. Many proponents of a deficit perspective historically based on heredity shifted from a genetic

pathology explanation and appropriated Lewis's theory to explain the persistence of poverty (Foley, 1997). Many other anthropologists and sociologists were very critical of the concept (Ginsburg, 1972; Keddie, 1973; Leacock, 1971; Liebow, 1967/2003), either on ethical grounds, that it blamed victims of structural inequality, or on scientific grounds, that there were problems either with the data or its interpretation. This and similar concepts of the time were critiqued as well by educators, such as Yetta Goodman (1969/1996). In actual fact, much of Oscar Lewis's work was a Marxist analysis of economic power relations and a call for solidarity and collective action among the poor, but Payne seems unaware of those elements of Lewis's work and only takes up the concept of *culture of poverty*.

Payne's appropriation of the *culture of poverty* (58, 77) allows her to portray the poor as belonging to a single group with specific negative traits. These traits are not neutral and lead Payne to advocate the remediation of the poor. Describing the notion of a culture of poverty, Foley writes:

> Lewis's list of 'cultural traits' of the poor evokes a powerful negative image of poor people as a lazy, fatalistic, hedonistic, violent, distrustful, people living in common law unions, as well as in dysfunctional, female-centered, authoritarian families who are chronically unemployed and rarely participate in local civic activities, vote, or trust the police and political leaders. . . . For anyone wanting to indict the poor, the culture of poverty theory is a powerful metaphor that spawns a sweeping, holistic image. It provides public policy makers and the general public with a relatively nontechnical, yet 'scientific' way to categorize and characterize all poor people. (1997)

Although Foley is describing Lewis's earlier theory, his words well describe Payne's work, as we shall see in the rest of our analysis. Payne introduces her "culture of poverty" concept through a quote from Lewis, and the characteristics she lists for economically disadvantaged family are identical to those that Foley lists here, as we demonstrate in what follows.

Race, ethnicity, and gender

Payne's explicit truth claims do not address or discuss the relationship of poverty to race, ethnicity, and gender. However, in the fictional case studies (which we did not include in our analysis, because they were not truth claims) and in the examples she chooses to place in lists (such as green cards and deportation), Payne enlists the reader's own associations about

these social categories. Obviously, casting people of color in six out of the nine “case studies” racializes the representation of poverty, but in the vast majority of the truth claims, she does not address race or ethnicity at all. Racializing the representations of poverty means that Payne is portraying poor people as people of color, rather than acknowledging the fact that most poor people in the US are white (Roberts, 2004). By doing so, Payne is perpetuating negative stereotypes by equating poverty with people of color. Although there is a correlation between race and class, this does not justify her use of racialized “case studies.”

Payne’s audience of teachers is primarily white, female, and middle class, so their probable shared perspective makes it likely that such signals will be understood as racial. Given that the truth claims do not explicitly address the relationships between poverty, race, ethnicity, and gender, we are merely pointing out the absence of such considerations from Payne’s work. They are significant in our data by virtue of their absence, though our fidelity to the data does not permit us to discuss them at length. However, many scholars have shown that race and class are inextricably bound together in US education (Anyon, 2005; Lareau, 2003; McCarthy, 1990; McCarthy & Apple, 1988; Weis, 1988; Weis & Fine, 1993) and that an understanding of gender is crucial to an analysis of families in conditions of poverty (Hays, 2004; Johnson, 2002).

Hidden rules

According to Payne, people in poverty are mostly identifiable by their adherence to the “hidden rules of poverty” (9, 38, 41, 42, 44). Payne defines hidden rules as “the unspoken cues and habits of a group. Distinct cueing systems exist between and among groups and economic classes.”(37). She provides examples of three hidden rules in poverty, informing us that: “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” (9). Payne offers no citations for any statements about hidden rules. She does not inform the reader how these hidden rules came to be revealed to her, nor does she explain the means by which they are supposed to be hidden, or from whom. This “hidden rules” approach is central to Payne’s perspective and an area in which she claims special expertise. However, Payne has not conducted any research regarding hidden rules nor does she offer any evidence to support them.

Payne contrasts hidden rules amongst people living in poverty and those living in the middle class. According to Payne, poor people view money as something to be spent, while to people in the middle class,

money is something to be managed. For the poor, "{m}oney is seen as an expression of personality and is used for entertainment and relationships. The notion of using money for security is truly grounded in the middle and wealthy classes" (44). Personality for the poor is "for entertainment" (42) and a "sense of humor is highly valued," (42) while for those in the middle class, personality "is for acquisition and stability" (43) and "achievement is highly valued" (43). Views of time are also quite different, where, Payne tells us, those in poverty view the "present most important" (sic) (42) and "decisions are made for moment based on feelings or survival" (sic) (42), while for the middle class, "future most important" (sic) (43) and "decisions made against future ramifications" (sic) (43). Education is "valued and revered as abstract but not as reality" (42) by the poor, while for those in the middle class, it is "crucial for climbing success ladder and making money" (sic) (43). Payne claims that one of the biggest differences among the classes is how the world is viewed. "Middle class tends to see the world in terms of a national picture, while poverty sees the world in its immediate locale" (44). As far as we can tell, these descriptions of the attitudes of both the poor and the middle class are completely baseless. We trust that we may be excused from providing evidence that many middle class people enjoy entertainment and have a sense of humor, or that many people who live in serious financial insecurity think often about their futures.

Payne's purpose in leading teachers to an understanding of hidden rules is so that the rules of the middle class can be taught explicitly to students, (45). The teaching of middle-class norms is necessary, according to Payne, because these rules are important in schools and businesses (3). Payne offers another possible explanation of hidden rules' importance when she writes, "An understanding of the culture and values of poverty will lessen the anger and frustration that educators may periodically feel when dealing with these students and parents " (45). Payne seems to be saying that once teachers and other educators comprehend the ways of the poor by knowing their hidden rules, they will feel less frustrated with them because it is in their essential nature to have values and behavior different from those in the middle class. It is through her conception of *hidden rules* that Payne places the onus on the children and their families, characterizing them as deficient. Though she uses the term "culture," our examination of her truth claims reveals that, in every instance, she pathologizes the "culture" or "rules" of the poor and valorizes the "culture" or "rules" of the middle class. She never considers the alternative, that social, economic and political structures—not their own behaviors and attitudes—have provided barriers to success in schools for poor children. As Tozer (2000) has written:

> The knowledge, language, and practices of one class are dominant and valued; those of the other classes are subordinate and devalued. Instead of a cultural deficit explanation for persistent school failure of low SES children, we can see the possibility of a cultural subordination explanation that is grounded in relations of domination and subordination in the economic and political order of society (p. 157).

Payne does not examine the ways in which schools and society have been structured in the interests of dominant classes. Those who may not fit neatly into the dominant groups' ways of being are defective, lacking in ability, and in need of being re-made so as to better resemble those from the dominant classes.

It is because of this deprecation of every characteristic she falsely and without basis attributes to the poor that we claim Payne's book represents a "deficit perspective." Individuals who subscribe to deficit perspectives do not actually use the term to describe their views. It is an analytic category that can be applied when certain conditions are met, and we think that Payne meets those conditions. Our critique of Payne's deficit perspectives is also supported by others who have written about her work (see Gorski, 2006; Ng & Rury, 2006; Osei-Kofi, 2005).

THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT OF POOR CHILDREN

Throughout much of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty,* we found assertions about the immediate, everyday environment of individuals and families in poverty. Though Payne is never completely explicit about why she believes teachers need to learn the things she tells them about poor people's ordinary lives, there are many suggestions that, because the lives of the poor are so different from those of teachers, teachers will be at a loss to communicate effectively with their students or parents of their students without explicit descriptions of students' and parents' everyday experiences. They will fail to classify many observable student behaviors as arising from their participation in a *culture of poverty*. Such a failure to classify would, presumably, result in corrections of behaviors such as loudness or lateness in terms that do not explicitly invoke the difference between the student's culture of origin (poverty) and that of the middle class, or school. Teachers are called upon, then, to narrativize and envision the lives of poor children in the way that Payne suggests, so that they can have certain kinds of ideas about those children and use particular language in speaking to them and their parents. The message to teachers is that the daily lives of students from poor families are different, almost

exotic, compared to the teacher's own and require explanation from an expert. An objectifying distance is necessary in order to interpret and respond to the behavior of these Others. Within the broad category of "immediate environment," we included Payne's claims about material dailiness, resources, and families, as illustrated in Table 1 and discussed in the next section.

Material dailiness

In order to impress upon teachers the degree to which life in poverty is alien to those in the middle class, Payne asserts dozens of truth claims regarding the material, daily conditions of poor people's existence. Two of the more well-known elements of the book are a "quiz" designed for teachers to self-assess whether or not they could "survive in poverty" (38) and a separate "IQ Test" designed to measure the "acquired information" of people in poverty (87). Through the questions she places on these tests, Payne asserts that poor people, more than those in middle class, know the following: how to get guns, how to get someone out of jail, and how to function at laundromats. She asserts that the poor get food from grocery store garbage bins, move often, have common law marriages, use "gray tape," and get green cards more than those from the middle class. According to Payne, the poor are more likely to know certain words, such as *roach*, *dissed*, and *deportation*. Her point is that the poor know these things because the material world is vastly different for people in poverty than it is for people in the middle class. Because so many of Payne's truth claims about the details of material dailiness are fabrications, it is difficult to test them against other sources of evidence. That is, her claims are not based on research, she does not offer any evidence for them, they are not accurate, and it appears that she made them up. We cannot show evidence that middle (and upper) class people know what a roach is, but we are confident that they do. If Payne means duct tape when she says "gray tape," the presence of ample inventory in middle-class home improvement stores would seem to suggest that the poor are not the only people acquainted with it. While it is true that approximately 11% of the US population suffers food insecurity and go hungry at times (Nord, M., Andrews, M., Carlson, S., 2006), we find no evidence that families or individuals living below the poverty line acquire food from grocery store dumpsters. It is difficult to check and Payne provides no support for this claim. It is easy to determine that the poor do not know more about getting guns than do those in the middle class, since most guns are owned by people with college educations (Glaeser & Glendon, 1998; National Institute of Justice, 1997). There is no evidence, therefore, that the poor

know better how to get them. The poor do indeed move often, though we could find no statistics comparing the frequency of moves to the middle class. They probably do move for different reasons than do those in the middle class, but because the category "poverty" includes everything from the homeless to the working class, it is not valid to generalize in this way. Seventy-eight percent of children of immigrants live above the poverty line, so the notion that deportation and green cards would be more familiar to individuals in poverty is incorrect (Capps, Fix, & Reardon-Anderson, 2003). The poor use laundromats, as do people who live in apartments, people who are traveling, those who live in urban areas and have little space for machinery, college students, other young people, and people who move frequently. Since only a few states recognize any form of "common-law marriage," knowledge about that topic is more likely to be distributed geographically than by social class. In sum, Payne's truth claims about the everyday lives of people living in poverty cannot be validated by consulting existing research, and she does not provide any evidentiary support for these claims. Later in the article, we present research findings that offer more promising information for educators.

Many of Payne's representations of the daily lives of the poor emphasize depravity, perversity, or criminality. For example, Payne provides us with three reasons why jail is part of life for many people living in poverty. First, if one is in generational poverty, there is a distrust of, and even distaste for "organized society," so crossing the line into illegal activity is something the poor often do. Second, a lack of resources means that poor individuals spend time in jail because they do not have the resources to avoid it. And finally, the poor "simply see jail as a part of life and not necessarily always bad {because} local jails provide food and shelter and as a general rule, are not as violent or dangerous as state incarceration" (22-23). So Payne believes that the poor do not really mind arrest or incarceration in local jails and simply view it as a part of their lives. Payne does not discuss the fact that many poor youth and adults, especially African-Americans, are given prison sentences for non-violent crimes, not simply time in local jails (Western, 2004). Nor does she consider the fact that, once someone has been incarcerated, it is probable that s/he will be poor for the rest of her/his life (Western, 2002). According to Payne, "Fighting and physical violence are a part of poverty" and "People living in poverty need to be able to defend themselves physically or they need someone to be their protector" (23-24). Payne repeatedly selects elements of daily life that represent the lives of the poor as characterized by violence, depravity, and criminality. Payne's selective

representations are negative stereotypes that essentialize poor people as immoral, violent, and socially deficient. These representations do not account for the majority of low-income people, who work hard, obey the law, and do not exhibit the behaviors and attitudes that Payne has described.

Resources

Payne employs the concept of "resources" to label diverse ways in which an individual, family, or community can be endowed or deprived. In fact, she defines poverty as "'the extent to which an individual does without resources'" (7). She identifies eight categories of resources: financial resources, emotional resources, mental resources, spiritual resources, physical resources, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules (7). The function of Payne's descriptions is to permit educators to believe that they have some influence on their students' future poverty status. Individuals will be able to overcome their economic status if they learn to overcome a scarcity of resources, such as emotional stability and the right kind of friendships and acquaintances. On the other hand, failure to develop these other resources, Payne asserts (22), is likely to land one in jail, because one is not acquainted with the appropriate limits to behavior. Resources are understood as being available to the individual, if the individual chooses to avail herself of them by drawing from her immediate environment. As Payne wrote, "[T]he resources that individuals have may vary significantly from situation to situation. Poverty is more about resources than it is about money." (25). Payne's conceptualization of resources thus permits her to move poverty out of a material realm and into a behavioral one.

Poor families

Payne goes to great lengths to represent the nature of poor families. Her defining class concept of generational poverty is rooted in families, since generations are familial by definition. Poverty is handed from parents to children through a kind of cultural heritability that is the responsibility of the school to break. In Payne's view of poor families, people see themselves as holding one another as property, and she states repeatedly that people are owned, or that when one is in poverty, people are one's only possessions (23, 42, 51-52, 59). She describes a family structure unique to poverty, wherein "the mother is always at the center, though she may have multiple sexual relationships," (54). Although Payne does not actually

cite Moynihan (1965), her depictions are very similar to his famous report, which has been critiqued by many (Biddle, 2001; Leacock, 1971; Ryan, 1971).

Payne employs diagrams to differentiate the stable, orderly, patrilineal progression of middle-class families, contrasted to a sprawling, web-like structure (including mention of a same-sex lover) extending from a large circle labeled "Jolyn," a matriarch in poverty (55). Payne claims that, when men leave their wives in such a structure, as they frequently do, they always stay with mothers or girlfriends, because men are not stable or central in the family (56). People are often in multiple relationships, and the home is full of comings and goings. If disorder characterizes the family structure, it is also present in the home environment, which Payne portrays as disorganized, noisy, violent, and nonverbal. These sorts of generalizations about homes and families of the poor have been long complicated by research that presents a more thorough, empirically based representation of poor households. (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leichter, 1978; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Varenne & McDermott, 1986).

In contrast to Ruby Payne's attempt to generalize a single exotic model of a family in poverty on the basis of no research data, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) conducted extensive ethnographies of poor, urban families. They found more differences among the families than similarities, and discovered that generalizations were actually very difficult to make, since people, even when they are poor, are different from one another. But they did identify certain similarities: a belief in their own abilities; the determination to raise healthy children; the provision of loving environments; caring for children with tenderness and affection; structured home environments; a concern for children's safety and well-being; and a valuing of children's independence and competence (194). Other studies have reported similar findings, that low-income families are attentive to their children's success in school and provide them with a home environment supportive of learning as well as materials for intellectual growth and schoolwork (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leichter, 1978; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Varenne & McDermott, 1986), but Payne does not consider these sources. If there is evidence to support Payne's claims about the daily lives of economically disadvantaged children, she does not tell us what that evidence might be. We suspect none exists, because we find ample evidence that contradicts her claims.

THE LANGUAGE OF POOR CHILDREN

Payne gives considerable attention to the language of the children of poverty. Language in poverty, according to her analysis, has the following characteristics: a limited vocabulary and reliance on nonverbal signs; circumlocution and indirection; more audience involvement; and a casual register that is not valued in school or work (28-31). These categories fall under the super-ordinate category of "language," and we coded 200 truth claims in these categories. These claims, all of which Payne names as maladies school must help students overcome, constitute deficits. Nonverbal cues are taken as replacing language and limiting the explicitness of disadvantaged people's speech, and "to be asked to communicate in writing without the non-verbal assists is an overwhelming and formidable task, which most of them try to avoid" (28). Casual register is understood as a limitation, something that keeps "poverty" students from appropriating school language, because formal register is "a hidden rule of the middle class" (28) and "to get a well-paying job, it is expected that one will be able to use formal register" (28). Circumlocution she views as a failure to get to the point, and states that "educators become frustrated with the tendency of these students to meander almost endlessly through a topic" (28). Audience involvement is interruptive of a continuous narrative stream and also, according to Payne, causes students to make mistakes in school-like turn taking and results in a failure to develop logical thinking (34). Stating "there is such a direct link between achievement and language" (34) Payne argues that the speech of the poor has stable, identifiable characteristics that present problems for teachers, and that speech prevents them from leaving poverty or experiencing success in school or work.

Payne does not consider the fact that differences in language or culture might be more significant to linguistic variation than socioeconomic status. She does not stipulate that she is talking only about native speakers of English, so we must assume that she means these linguistic descriptions to apply equally to students whose first language is Spanish, African-American English, Navajo, Arabic, Hawaiian, Chinese, Appalachian English, Haitian Creole, Y'upik, among others—the kaleidoscope of languages teachers encounter, though, in the US, all these groups are disproportionately likely to live in poverty. Keeping such wide variation in language in mind, it is difficult to make sense of a claim like: "For students who have no access to formal register, educators become frustrated with the tendency of these students to meander almost endlessly through a topic" (28). In her claims, she appears to mix things some linguists have said about African-Americans, a misunderstanding of one article

contrasting Mexican nationals and US students, some class-based deficit theory from England, with a radically simplified account of registers. She argues, working from this mixture of disparate sources, that it is poverty that creates the speech styles of African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and many other groups that are disproportionately poor in the US (27-35). This conclusion is out of sync with linguistic and educational research on these groups, which finds, among other things, that language patterns are rooted in traditions of people's origins and in continuous innovations through which group members signal their affiliation with one another (for example, Nieto, 1999; Smitherman, 1977).

Restricted language

Payne does not explain how the language of people in poverty is both restricted by limited vocabulary and "nonverbal assists," (28) and is also characterized by circumlocution, taking the longest route to get to the point. In other words, the speech of disadvantaged students is both terse and verbose. If Payne means that individuals employ both speech styles, depending upon the sociolinguistic context, she does not say so, and nothing in her characterization of the language of the poor suggests that kind of sophisticated flexibility. Both verbosity and lack of language are described as faults in the speech of students and their families.

As to the first part of the claim, the notion that economic poverty corresponds to a kind of linguistic poverty, a language with fewer words, was common in the twentieth century, and has been researched extensively. Payne has conducted no research herself and cites none with respect to this claim. By and large, linguists have rejected the notion that any group can be thought of as having an impoverished language. The notion is sociolinguistically meaningless, since every group uses language that is adequate to its social needs. Most linguistic researchers critiqued the methods by which language samples were collected from poor individuals, because subjects, usually children, were asked to produce language in unfamiliar and threatening speech situations. Labov found that changing the situation in which the language was elicited—by bringing in another child, sitting on the floor, supplying potato chips, or introducing taboo words—altered the appearance of competence in the performance. He wrote, "the social situation is the most powerful determinant of verbal behavior and . . . an adult must enter into the right social relation with a child if he wants to find out what a child can do: this is just what many teachers cannot do" (1972, 191). Furthermore, none of the studies on which the linguistic deficit theory was based found that individuals in poverty never produced complex or elaborated syntax or vocabulary;

only that they did so less often than middle-class counterparts. Therefore, the issue was not one of competence, but performance; it was something in the speech situation that kept subjects from producing the expected language sample more often. Several linguists (Dittmar, 1976; A. D. Edwards, 1976; J. R. Edwards, 1979; Trudgill, 1974) have examined the claims and counter-claims regarding the restricted language of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and the consensus is that perceived linguistic deficits are invariably due to differences in interpreting aspects of the context. The poor do not have less language than the middle class or wealthy.

Circumlocution and indirection

In describing what she calls "discourse patterns," (30) Payne asserts that parents and children from poverty "need to beat around the bush" (30) before getting to the point. This circumlocution, she claims, results in miscommunication between teachers committed to getting to the point and parents more used to circumlocution. It is also an impediment to the literacy development of students, because, she says, school writing values getting to the point, whereas children from poverty "circle the mulberry bush" (30). It is true that Smitherman demonstrated that circumlocution and indirection are characteristics of African-American language (Smitherman, 1977), but that is because they are characteristics of African language, not a function of poverty. Michaels (1981) likewise found that some African-American students may have a different understanding of what it means to stay on a topic than do their white teachers, but in Michaels' writing, the failure is not in the student, but in the teacher's lack of recognition of the legitimacy of the student's speech norms. Labov, contrary to Payne's assertion, found that a black young person living in poverty had a much more direct style, with fewer hedges and less circumlocution than a middle-class African-American (1972). Labov's findings indicate that, in fact, lower social class might account for directness, rather than indirectness. There is, in other words, no research-based reason to state that people in poverty, as a class, talk around the topic more than do people in the middle class.

Audience involvement

Payne also describes the oral storytelling of people in poverty as composed of disorganized episodes with audience participation interspersed (31). High audience involvement, with overlaps, interjections, and interruptions, is a conversational style that characterizes many cultures and

subcultures (Tannen, 1981, 1985). The performative dimension of speech, wherein a storyteller is concerned more with the interaction with people in the room than with the clarity of verbal message is often associated with African-American speech styles (Dyson, 1993; Gee, 1990; Grace, 2004; Michaels, 1981; Smitherman, 1977). However, a sense of craft in storytelling is connected to findings that demonstrate the rich potential for meaning and verbal art of various groups, irrespective of economic status (Bauman, 1986). There is no evidence that social class or poverty/wealth distinctions are formative in such oral genres or styles, nor is there evidence that different linguistic and cultural groups that share conditions of poverty have any family resemblance simply as a result of their poverty.

Register

Payne places particular emphasis on the distinction between casual and formal register (27-35). She cites Joos (1962) as her source and outlines his continuum of five different registers, using only two of these—formal and informal— and drawing a sharp line between the two. Joos's book is not based upon empirical research; rather it is simply an assertion that there are degrees of formality in human interaction. Joos does not claim that the formal register is the language of school and work, as Payne does; in fact, his description of what he calls consultative register is much nearer to school discourse, and work language takes many different registers, depending upon the relationships among interlocutors (Joos, 1962). Payne's explicit claim is that there exist two distinct varieties of English—one formal and one informal. She states that "[poor] students cannot use formal register" (28), and she represents poor students as trapped within a barely-verbal casual register. Her approach to the continuum is so binary that it is nearly a claim that English is composed of a diglossia (Ferguson, 1972, 1991)—two separate languages, one formal and one informal. Though there are languages that have such a diglossia, English does not. Some scholars have considered the possibility that African-Americans participate in a diglossic language system between AAE and classroom English, but most have rejected that possibility because the two are not sufficiently distinct when compared with the diglossias of cultures where the language for royalty, for instance, has a completely separate lexicon and grammar. Payne's contention that there are two registers and that their use is bound to social class is not supported by any linguistic or sociolinguistic research we can identify. Everyone uses varied registers in appropriate social situations, and the

variation among language groups that might live in poverty is much greater than the similarities.

As her source for her claims about the registers employed by people in poverty, Payne cites a study by Montano-Harmon (Montano-Harmon, 1991) as the basis for the statement that " . . . the majority . . . of minority students and poor students do not have access to formal register at home. As a matter of fact, these students cannot use formal register" (28). In fact, Montano-Harmon's study does not investigate poverty effects. The students she studied were "working class," from four linguistic groups: Mexican national speakers of Spanish; ESL students in the US, immigrants from Mexico who were native speakers of Spanish; Anglo students in the US who were native speakers of English; and Mexican-American/Chicano students who were native speakers of English. The study investigates contrasting text features (rhetorical strategies) in the writing of ninth-grade students in Mexican schools compared with students in US schools, and considers no data related to speech. Register is not an analytic category in the study at all, and neither is poverty. Montano-Harmon does mention in passing that Chicano students who spoke English and not Spanish had more trouble in school, for reasons of a mismatch between the form of English they usually speak and the form usually valued by the school, but the Chicano students were not poorer than the other students studied. In fact, this study, the only one Payne cites, contradicts her assertion that students in poverty have particular language features in common, and especially that they have a particular register in which they are trapped.

If it matters at all that teachers understand the language patterns that their students bring to school, then surely they should understand them accurately. Payne's poorly delineated summary of language patterns is worse than no help at all, since it prepares teachers to blur distinctions among groups whose language is completely different and who need different forms of support from their teachers. Moreover, by characterizing students' language as deficient and prescribing an approach of "direct teaching" of supposedly middle-class language patterns, Payne positions teachers to look for errors and to correct them. Such a disposition runs counter to the findings and recommendations of many researchers on language development, such as Halliday (1975), Lindfors (1980), Rice (1996), and Nelson (1996), all of whom emphasize that language is learned through meaning, shared attention, and through building on the competence of the learner, rather than aiming for the remediation of deficiencies.

INDIVIDUALS IN POVERTY

The fourth super-ordinate category into which we grouped Payne's truth claims concerns individuals living in poverty. Truth claims in this group dealt with characteristics of individual persons' characters, minds, attitudes, and behaviors. Payne's overall perspective is individualistic, focusing on individuals' choices and habits as defining their identities as poor people as well as the cause of their material poverty. She does not entertain alternative views (see Biddle, 2001) that low-income students' problems in education are attributable to material disadvantages, to discrimination within the education system, to inadequate funding of poor schools, and to careful resource management by the rich and powerful that favors children from their own class backgrounds. We focus here on what Payne does claim in her book and the basis for her claims. We organize our discussion under the categories of cognition (10 codes from 176 truth claims), worldview (27 codes, 302 truth claims), and men and women (four codes, 51 truth claims).

Cognition

Payne claims that, because of various deficiencies, students from low-income households lack cognitive strategies (90). Drawing from Feuerstein (1980), she asserts that poor students have blurred and sweeping perceptions related to the randomly episodic structure in their storytelling; that they see only half of what is on a page; that they have impaired spatial and temporal orientation; that they do not have concepts or vocabulary for directions, location, object size, or object shape, nor can they keep the memory of an object constant; and that they cannot hold two objects or sources in mind to compare them (92-93). The assertions range from perceptual problems to deficiencies in judgment. Here we will provide just one example, quoting Payne, leaving the features of her text as she has them in the book:

> If an individual depends upon a random, episodic story structure for memory patterns, lives in an unpredictable environment, and **has not developed the ability to plan,** then…
> If an individual cannot plan, he/she **cannot predict**.
> If an individual cannot predict, he/she **cannot identify cause and effect**.
> If an individual cannot identify cause and effect, he/she **cannot identify consequence**.

> If an individual cannot identify consequence, he/she **cannot control impulsivity**.
> If an individual cannot control impulsivity, he/she **has an inclination toward criminal behavior** (bold in original) (90).

Payne makes her way from a narrative style (which she has incorrectly described as random among people in poverty) all the way to criminality. The initial assumptions are incorrect, about the chaotic lives, random narrative style, and inability to plan among low-income citizens. The studies cited earlier demonstrate that lives at the edge of economic stability are often carefully ordered and planned, even if they do not mesh well with the structures of some social institutions. Moreover, the notion that people "cannot plan" is an indefensible assertion of a cognitive deficit. Economic hardship does not make planning impossible as a mental act; it makes the realization of plans difficult, as a material outcome. Furthermore, even if it were true that a particular individual "cannot plan," it is an unwarranted leap in logic to assert that such a condition precludes predicting or identifying consequence. And none of these deficiencies, if they existed, leads to criminality, which is obviously dependent on morality and receptivity to social influences, not just the prediction of particular consequences. Payne's assertions again characterize the poor, without evidence, as deeply flawed human beings, whose personal failings make continued poverty—or worse conditions—inevitable.

Worldview

Payne characterizes the worldview shared among people living in poverty as being chaotic, living from moment to moment, valuing entertainment more than anything else, and disregarding the consequences of one's actions. The households of people in poverty lack order and organization and many of them "are unkempt and cluttered. Devices for organization (files, planners, etc.) don't exist" (53).

Payne claims that poor people live only in the present and that, for the poor, the future does not exist, "except as a word" (52). She asserts that time is flexible for the poor, not measured, and that poor people live in the moment without any consideration for "future ramifications"(52); "Being proactive, setting goals, and planning ahead are not a part of generational poverty. Most of what occurs is reactive and in the moment. Future implications of present actions are seldom considered" (53). Payne's stereotype of the time orientation of low-income people is hardly new and has been familiar since Lewis (1961), if not before.

Payne informs us that the poor have a more sensual and kinesthetic

approach to life than the middle class. In fact, she claims that the "mating dance" (52) is a characteristic of people in generational poverty, where the body is used in a sexual way that accentuates parts of the body, through both verbal and non-verbal means: "If you have few financial resources, the way you sexually attract someone is with your body" (52). Once again, the claim lacks foundation and pathologizes the poor as hyper-sexed and deviant. Payne is addressing teachers about the poor children in their classrooms, and in this context, she suggests that the adult women in those children's lives are likely to use sex for economic advancement, a claim that echoes a long history of US middle-class worries about the sexual threat posed by poor people who are assumed to be sexually immoral (Katz, 1995). Meanwhile, Payne implies that middle-class people attract one another sexually by means of financial resources.

Poor people are fatalistic: they believe that destiny and fate govern their lives and that agency is rarely an option for them, according to Payne (52). The poor leave much to chance and do not believe that they can change the present or future through making choices that might affect their lives, Payne claims. They do not view freedom as part of their lives. Ultimately, Payne claims that the poor choose to stay poor, through their orientation and behaviors.

The poor value entertainment highly, according to Payne. She asserts that, because the poor are simply surviving, respite from stressful conditions is extremely important, and that, "in fact, entertainment brings respite" (51). Given the importance of entertainment, a key personality attribute for the poor is the ability to entertain, tell stories, and have a good sense of humor. Without evidence, Payne makes sure that we know that poor people all have VCRs because of the high value they place on entertainment. America has a large entertainment industry; we assume it is obvious that it is not the poor alone who support it. A desire for entertainment, for distraction, seems to be a contemporary trait across much of the world; it is not unique to poverty.

Men and women

Payne claims that men in poverty are expected to work hard at physical labor and to be fighters and lovers. Bars and work are their only two social outlets and they tend to avoid other social settings. "A real man is ruggedly good-looking, is a lover, can physically fight, works hard, takes no crap" (59). Men who take on the identities of fighters and lovers cannot have stable lives because, in choosing among the three responses to life, ("to flee, flow or fight" (60)) they can only fight or flee. Men fight when under stress, and then they run away from the police and their

families. It seems that Payne is arguing that men must both fight *and* flee. In any case, she does not offer any evidence to support her assertions about men in poverty, and we find none in the research literature. Furthermore, we consider these made-up claims to be stereotyped. What is clear in anthropological and sociological studies of men in poverty is that their responses are diverse.

Payne makes the following claims about women in poverty: Women socialize with women. Unless they are employed outside of their homes, women with children stay at home and their only friends are other female relatives. Real women take care of their men by feeding them and downplaying their faults (59). Mothers are always at the center of their families, and they have multiple sexual relationships, as do their children. Teenage pregnancy and motherhood is common and accepted as part of the "culture of poverty." Payne also claims that one of the rules in generational poverty for women is that they may need to use their bodies 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" (24-25). In this view, women in generational poverty (as well as those in poverty in general) are prostitutes with little in terms of moral/ethical values that get in the way of providing sustenance for their families. Payne does not provide any evidence to support such claims.

Our analysis reveals that, for Payne, poverty is actually behavior—those who exhibit certain types of behaviors are not, by definition, middle class—and therefore, are viewed as belonging to poverty. Poverty is not, for her, a matter of a lack of income; the meaning of poverty is that certain individuals behave in ways that schools and employers find unacceptable. This conceptualization of poverty as behavior rather than economic means is, quite obviously, wrong. The meta-analyses of Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1999, 2001) reveal that it is lack of income, most importantly in early childhood, that corresponds to persistent problems in academic learning. Lack of household income during adolescence may also stress a family in ways that produce a variety of emotional and behavioral, and consequently academic, difficulties. Payne cannot accept an explanation based upon income, however, because she has determined that poverty does not equate with financial resources but rather with attitude and behavior.

A significantly different set of understandings about the competence of poor individuals is provided by the research conducted by Luis Moll, Norma González and their colleagues (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992). In their studies of low-income Mexican-origin families, Moll and his colleagues found that these

families had ample intellectual and practical “funds of knowledge,” both within their own households, as well as in their family social networks, that were an integral part of surviving in low-income communities. A few examples of the abundant and diverse funds of knowledge that these researchers found in Tucson households include: information about farming and animal husbandry, knowledge about construction and building, contemporary and folk medicine, and knowledge about trade, business and finance on both sides of the US-Mexico border:

> The concept of *funds of knowledge*...is based on a simple premise: People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge. Our claim is that first-hand research experiences with families allow one to document this competence and knowledge. It is this engagement that opened up many possibilities for pedagogical actions (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005:x).

These researchers worked closely with teachers to utilize the multiple funds of knowledge in classrooms as resources for teaching, drawing on students' knowledge as key tools to mediate thinking and learning, and to reposition them in the classroom as knowers who bring vital intellectual and practical resources from their homes. This approach supports an alternative perspective of poor and working class individuals, one that views them “primarily in terms of their strengths and resources (or funds of knowledge) as their defining characteristic” (x).

Contrary to Payne's deficit perspective on poor adults and children, a funds of knowledge orientation demonstrates that poor and working class children have access to a broad array of social and cultural tools and knowledge that may teachers may tap. Researchers in other areas of the USA have documented funds of knowledge for teaching in low-income households (see e.g., Brendan, 2005; Mercado, 2005). Rather than offering ways to remediate “students of poverty,” as Payne does, these educators identify the many ways that students might be supported and encouraged to use their knowledge for learning in the classroom (Gonzáles et al., 2005; Moll, 1992; Moll et al., 1992).

DISCUSSION

Our analysis of Payne's truth claims reveals that her characterizations of people living in poverty represent a classic example of deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). Though Payne herself does not use the term “deficit” explicitly, the analysis we have reported above leads us to conclude that

the scholarly literature on deficit perspectives may aptly be applied to her book. The deficit perspective has been advanced for decades by some to explain school failure among low-income and students of color, and is currently experiencing a resurgence in educational theory and practice as educators responding to federal mandates "rediscover the poor" (Patterson, 2000). At its root, deficit thinking holds that students who struggle or fail in school do so because of their own internal deficits or deficiencies. Ryan (1971) called this perspective "blaming the victim." These deficits are evident, according to those holding this view, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior (Valencia, 1997). Proponents of the deficit model do not look to external factors to account for school failure, such as the ways schools are organized, inequalities in school funding and resources, and oppressive policies and practices at both the macro- and micro-levels (Anyon, 2005). The perspective is both essentializing of members of groups, so that all "people in poverty" share characteristics, and is simultaneously individualistic, placing the fault for poverty on the inadequate individual.

There are two basic varieties of deficit thinking. One is genetic, where poor performance of students from low-income households is held to be transmitted through biology. The other perspective, and the one that Payne advocates, is the culture of poverty view, where the self-sustaining cultural models of the poor are thought to be carriers of deficits like school failure and intergenerational poverty. In this variety of deficit thinking, the family and home environmental contexts are identified as the transmitters of pathology (Valencia, 1997). As Valencia (1997) has written:

> Deficit thinking is a person-centered explanation of school failure among individuals linked to group membership (typically, the combination of racial/ethnic minority status and economic disadvantagement). The deficit thinking framework holds that poor schooling performance is rooted in students' alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, while institutional structures and inequitable schooling arrangements that exclude students from learning are held exculpatory. Finally, the model is largely based on imputation and little documentation (9).

Given Payne's deficit perspective, it is no wonder that the attributes of the poor that she describes are based in their family structure, orientation, dysfunctionality, violence, lack of morals, and "hidden rules." Her views on the poor lack substantiation in research or any other forms of

evidence, conforming precisely to the culture of poverty variant of deficit thinking. Thus, Payne's views are in line with current deficit perspectives and practices in education and ask teachers to adopt negative stereotypes and caricatures of poor adults and children.

Payne's views would simply be the factually inaccurate opinions of a self-published former principal, if so many educators were not influenced by her work. However, reading her book and hearing Payne speak appears to influence the thinking of many teachers, or else one could not account for her popularity. Teachers' thinking is important, because teaching involves the enactment of that thinking. Teachers make decisions on the run about how to respond to their students on the basis of the models they have in mind of student learning, the material to be taught, and the students they teach. They plan lessons, curricula, ongoing classroom routines, and experiences for students based in part on their assumptions about what those students already know and what they are capable of learning. They also carry assumptions about the kinds of language they should use with students and the aspects of life they have in common with their students. Much of the research literature on teachers names the idea we are discussing here as *teacher beliefs* (Pajares, 1992). It is well-established in this literature that teacher beliefs have an impact on the ways they teach and on their students' learning (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Nespor, 1987).

Since teachers do make decisions and plans on the basis of their beliefs or conceptualizations of their students, students' daily lives are strongly affected by the influences on their teachers' thinking. We have demonstrated through our analysis that teachers may be misinformed by Payne's claims. Poverty in Payne's work is marked only as a negative, only as a divergence from a middle-class norm, and students who are "of poverty" need to be fixed. This way of regarding the children of poor parents has predictable and undesirable consequences in US education (Brophy & Good, 1974; Rist, 1970; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). As a consequence of low teacher expectations, poor students are more likely to be in lower tracks or lower ability groups (Ansalone, 2001, 2003; Connor & Boskin, 2001; Gamoran & Berends, 1987; Oakes, 1985), and their educational experience is more often dominated by rote drill and practice (Anyon, 1980, 1997; Dudley-Marling & Paugh, 2005; Moll, 1988; Moll & Ruiz, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999).

Nowhere in her book does Payne state that poverty, rather than the poor, is the problem that must be addressed. She offers no perspective that people should hold elected officials accountable for the number of families in poverty, or the conditions in which people must live when their incomes are low. Although the fourth edition was published almost

a decade after welfare reform, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* makes no reference to the elimination of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). She does not connect the misfortunes of the poor to the fortunes of the middle class and wealthy by examining policies regarding housing, segregation, taxation, or public expenditures. She does not analyze the degree to which wealthy and middle-class families proactively structure advantage for their children at the expense of the children of the less fortunate (Biddle, 2001; Brantlinger, 2003; Cookson, 1994). At no time does she suggest that the hundreds of thousands of educators she addresses might attempt to advocate for the basic needs of the children they teach. Poor children do not only have trouble in school; they are likely to live in substandard housing, eat an inadequate diet, wear threadbare clothes, lack health insurance, and have chronic health and dental problems. Though we know many teachers of poor children who regularly feed their students with their own money, one will not find such priorities in Ruby Payne's work. We believe that to discuss poverty among caring people obligates one to challenge others to do something about poverty itself—to give, to volunteer, to speak out, to hold politicians accountable—in short, to change a system that perpetuates poverty.

Furthermore, nowhere in Payne's work is there a suggestion that students might be taught to think about social class and poverty. There is no hint that people ought to be taught to question the structures that oppress them and others like them systematically (Freire, 1970). We would suggest that a curriculum that addresses class as a significant conceptual lens through which to view people's lives, their society, and the texts they read is essential to the responsible education of all people in a social world divided by class, and it might be especially motivating and liberating to those oppressed by such a system (Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Edelsky, 1999; Fecho & Allen, 2003; Finn, 1999; Hicks, 2002; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1989; Shor & Pari, 1999; Swenson, 2003; Yagelski, 2000).

We would also suggest that an ethical education system does not teach students to think of anything that makes one secure in the middle class as an unquestioned good. Transforming one's character in order to climb a social ladder should not be necessary and is not a noble thing to do. Other values are available than simply conforming to the middle class. In fact, it has been demonstrated repeatedly that when people without advantage, social position, or opportunity internalize US middle-class values, those very values cause significantly more damage in their lives than they offer new opportunity (Bourgois, 1995; Foley, 1994; Liebow, 1967/2003; Mahler, 1995; Newman, 2000), partly because by internalizing the views of those who are financially better-off, poor individuals

come to blame themselves for their failure to get ahead.

This lack of attention to a critical perspective is consonant with Payne's individualistic, deficit, blame-the-victim perspective. Such a perspective aligns well with right-wing social policy. If the poor are poor simply because they do not know how to behave as if they were not poor, then the middle class and the wealthy should not be taxed to provide public assistance, public health, public schooling, or a public sphere in which the poor might participate. According to such a perspective, neither structural inequality, nor public policy, nor barriers to good jobs, nor lack of money cause the plight of the poor; they just don't have the right story structure, or tone of voice, or register, or cognitive strategies.

As we said at the beginning of this article, Ruby Payne's success with her program on poverty is impressive. Her book is self-published; she earns the royalty as well as the publisher's margin; her only expense is having it printed. If in fact over 800,000 copies have been sold between the 1998 and 2005 editions, as the most recent cover claims, that single book has probably made many millions of dollars. The success of the book and the business to which it is attached is not attributable to entrepreneurship alone. The appeal of the book relies on a set of values—a framework—that exists outside of education, and is pervasive throughout middle-class US society. Policy that constructs poverty as a problem of schools creates a large industry that consists of many more businesses than just Payne's. Her success indicts all of us in education, indeed most of the American public, as it reveals the degree to which we use the education system to protect our own sense of entitlement to privilege.

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