

# Controversial author/researcher gives her take on conquering poverty

BY LAYLA GARMES  
THE CHRONICLE

Dr. Ruby Payne, author of "Bridges out of Poverty," led a three-hour workshop last week, schooling a group of more than 150 social service and non-profit officials on ways that they can help their clients thrive.

Payne is the founder of Highlands, Tex.-based aha! Process, Inc., which offers "products and straightforward training to help clients understand the impact of poverty on people's lives." The company's offerings are based on Payne's research.

The group she addressed Feb. 13 at Goodwill Industries on University Parkway hailed from agencies across the state and included some participants from Maryland, according to Alisa Quick, a spokesperson for the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem, which hosted Payne's visit.

Payne, whose subject was "Cultural Barriers and Hidden Rules of Poverty," said the American socioeconomic structure can be broken into three groups: the generational poverty group, the middle class and the wealthy. Each group, she said, has its own set of priorities that influence their hidden rules. People of low wealth value relationships most, while the middle class values achievements and the wealthy value connections, she said.

"To move from poverty to middle class, relationships must temporarily be sacrificed for achievement," she said. "It's legendary in community colleges that women will get one or two courses from a degree and then they'll quit, and it has to do with relationships."

To illustrate the universal nature of the rules, she threw out several open ended sentences based on middle class rules, which the audience answered in unison, without



Dr. Ruby Payne addresses attendees at Goodwill last week.

hesitation.

"If you borrow money..." she prompted. "Pay it back," the group responded.

"And do you tell people your salary?" she asked, to a resounding "No!"

Similarly, each group has its own way of expressing their love for their children. In the middle class, the common practice is to engage the children in activities that promote development, such as sports or artistic programs, whereas the wealthy often enroll their children in boarding schools.

"In generational poverty, if you want to show that you love your children, you buy them designer shoes and clothes because it's tangible - everybody can see that you love your child and you sacrifice for them," she explained.

Understanding the rules that govern members of a given class - such as generational poverty - allows service providers to help their clients navigate the obstacles



Quick



Oberle

they face in elevating their status and joining the middle class, Payne said.

"Social bridging capital is when you interact with people who are different than yourself. What will derail that fast is when you don't know the hidden rules," she remarked. "They're huge in community interactions."

Ignorance of hidden rules in a different class can lead to misunderstandings and ineffective programming, because the unseen factors have not been addressed, Payne said. She used the example of a school principal who gave two children at her school \$200 to purchase new clothes because their wardrobe was scarce. The children's mother spent the money on a new television and DVD player. The principal was angry because she didn't understand one of the chief rules of poverty, Payne said.

"Poverty is painful, and a priority for your money is' entertain-

ment," she explained. "It takes away your pain."

Payne has been roundly criticized by some academics, who claim her research is based on stereotypes and accuse her of classism, but she said last week that neither is the case. Though certain patterns can be associated with certain groups, Payne said this is a function of the environment they live in, not any contrived perception.

"Patterning is something everybody does as an efficient way of negotiating their environment," she said.

Sylvia Oberle, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Forsyth County, said she read "Bridges out of Poverty" and found Payne's insight helpful.

"It's absolutely essential," said Oberle, who brought Habitat's six senior staffers with her to the seminar. "...I think the point of the book and the point that she's trying to make today is that institutions like ours, although well meaning, are operating out of that middle class framework, and we are trying to help people transition out of generational poverty. It's valuable for us to understand this."

Goodwill CEO Art Gibel said he read Payne's book last summer and was so blown away by her philosophy that he started distributing it to other nonprofit leaders around town. He is even using it as a model to enhance the way Goodwill delivers services.

Quick said she believes Payne's seminar could have a positive effect on the broader community.

"As a result of so many people coming together, we hope to get a better understanding of the populations we work with," Quick stated. "Understanding their point of view regarding life's challenges will better equip our community partners to help them overcome any hurdles successfully."

## Another Highway 52 ramp closes

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The N.C. Department of Transportation has permanently closed the entrance ramp from Fifth Street onto U.S. 52 North in Winston-Salem. DOT says the closure, which occurred Monday, is part of an effort to streamline traffic flow on the highway, which will help improve motorist safety and reduce congestion.

NCDOT already has permanently closed the other entrance and exit ramps at Third, Fourth and Fifth streets and U.S. 52 South, as well as the exit ramp from U.S. 52 North onto Third Street.

According to officials, the closures are allowing crews to construct an additional lane on U.S. 52 in each direction from U.S. 421/Business 40 to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. Eliminating the ramps and adding a new acceleration lane will help alleviate traffic delays and reduce crashes on the highway, which carries 80,000-90,000 vehicles a day.

The closures are part of the U.S. 52 Improvement Project, which includes streamlining and repaving one-half mile of U.S. 52 from U.S. 421/Business 40 to Akron Drive and improving part of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in Winston-Salem. The \$13.1 million project is scheduled to be complete in early summer.



## Zellner

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Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at a local church. He was there to preach at a civil rights organizing workshop. The threat of arrest became real for the students when police arrived and surrounded the church - a practice meant to intimidate that was often employed by Southern law enforcement officials.

Zellner said that King allowed the white students to exit the church undetected. He told them he would exit through the church's main door to create a distraction that would allow them to leave through a rear door.

Zellner said as the students waited for King to exit the church, Rosa Parks, whom Zellner described as a "silent, quiet woman of granite," reached over and touched him on the elbow.

"Mrs. Rosa Parks said, 'Bob, when you see something wrong, you're going to have to do something about it. You cannot study it forever; you have to take action.'" Zellner recalled. "And sure enough, that was the commission to me, a little white boy born in L.A., Lower Alabama, to participate in this movement, to not live a life that I would be judged not to have lived, but to participate in the issues of my time."

Zellner and the other students did not escape the episode without consequences. School adminis-

trators asked them to resign for disgracing the school. The state attorney general told them they had fallen under Communist influence. The Klan burned crosses outside their dorm. Zellner said all of this is when his true race relations education began.

Despite objections from some school officials, Zellner graduated in 1961 with the highest honors and went to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, where he became a field secretary.

Initially, Zellner said, some black members of the organization were suspicious of him because of his race. Suspensions evaporated on his first organizing job in Macon, Miss., when he said he was attacked by Klansmen who tried to kill him.

The terrifying experience didn't deter him. His long career as an activist included 18 arrests in seven states and organizing an anti-racism project for the Southern Conference Educational Fund.

Zellner is still fighting for what he sees as right and just. During his lecture, he railed against Republicans for relying on a "Southern strategy" of using racism to win Southern votes.

Zellner said though racism persists, there is now a resurgence in activism that he calls the "Third Reconstruction." He said he's working with the N.C. NAACP and a coalition of other organizations to establish a school in

Wilson that will train organizers.

"There's something new happening and the reason it's happening is that it has to be done," said Zellner. "...We don't know what the next historical moment is going to be but I'm convinced you're going to be a part of it."

The crowd also heard from Rob Stephens, a Winston-Salem native who is the field director for the NC NAACP. Stephens, who, like Zellner, is white and began working as an activist when he was in high school, talked about some current NAACP initiatives.

Zellner's story was both inspiring and enlightening to Wake senior Bentrice Jusu, who received the school's 2012 Martin Luther King Building the Dream Award for starting a non-profit (Both Hands) in her native Trenton, N.J. that uses the arts to engage inner city youth.

The art major said that she'd never heard a white person talk as openly about race as Zellner did.

"The issue of race is never brought up candidly," she said. "It's always swept under the rug and to hear him speak of it, it inspired me to continue my audacious attempt to confront this issue of racism, to talk about it regardless of who's around because we're all affected by it."

Zellner's lecture, sponsored by the WFU Office of Multicultural Affairs, is part of the school's "Faces of Courage," a series of events and initiatives designed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of racial integration at Wake Forest.

Photos by Todd Luck

NC NAACP Field Director Rob Stephens speaks as Bob Zellner looks on.

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She saw her dad blow insulation into the attic to make the house more energy-efficient. Then, she got an idea. Find out how energy efficiency at home means a better world for everyone at [TogetherWeSave.com](http://TogetherWeSave.com).

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