



A *Virginia Main Street* discussion series for
community & neighborhood revitalization teams

Dar Williams'
What I Found in a Thousand Towns
Basic Books (2017)

Think in bridges.

CHAPTER 8: Conscious Bridgers

POSITIVE PROXIMITY *summary*: A community can use proximity to its advantage to integrate the talents and skills of residents. Successful revitalization programs use physical **spaces** to foster positive interaction. They take on **projects** that shape the community identity. Critically, they **engage** the spectrum of the community in making these a reality. (Williams calls this *translation*, the act of a town opening up to itself.)

“...**TRANSLATION** is all of the acts of communication that open up a town to itself and the world...the ability of a place to incorporate every willing citizen’s contributions, and in so doing, find ways to make life more interesting, welcome the outside world, and provide stability for those who need support.”

CONSCIOUS BRIDGERS: Questions for Discussion

1. “Positive proximity is built through collective effort...” yet there are some people who we can learn from. **Conscious Bridgers**—“**love to make connections everywhere they go**. They weave together disparate fibers of a town’s identity, open channels of communication, and turn up the volume of all that is fun and good in a town...Sometimes these citizens don’t even know that what they are doing involves and actual skill set, but it does.” (p. 213).
 - a. In what setting (work, family, volunteer committee...) are you most like this?
 - b. Who else in your community fits this bill?
2. **Watch Finding Main Street Video #8, featuring the town of Wytheville.** Do you see any similarities between Wytheville and your community?
3. “**Bridging social capital** interweaves the strengths and weaknesses of different demographics so that positive proximity can be experienced more widely and confidently.” (p. 216) What demographic groups could be better woven into your community efforts?
4. “Conscious bridgers are always on the lookout for **new alliances and connections.**” (p. 216) They “experience each project as a learning opportunity in which they themselves can thrive.” They are interested in “finding opportunities for the whole community to gain more access to understanding, to healing; and in both the long and short term, to justice. (p. 228)
 - a. Pick a current community project to discuss.
 - b. Are there additional opportunities to bridges, increase access, or even increase justice through the project?
 - c. How can you collectively learn through the project?

