

*Communication Across Barriers*

# POVERTY INSTITUTE GUIDE



We CAN Make a Difference  
for People Fighting Poverty!

If Not Me, Then Who?



# Poverty Institute

## Table of Content

Welcome	3
Poverty Institute Overview:	4
Learning Objectives	5
Guiding Facts	6
What Poverty Teaches	7
Worldview of People Impacted by Poverty!	8
Worldview of People Who Succeed in Education!	9
Reflection Activity	10
Oral and Print Communication	12
Communication Quiz	14
What Works	16
Research-based Strategies	17
Building Relationships, Navigating	18
Characteristics of Effective Mentors	19
What Money?	21
Learning Styles Explored	23
Learning Style Descriptions	25
What We Want You to Take Away	27

# Welcome

## A Message from Dr. Donna M. Beegle

Welcome and thank you for choosing a profession where you have the opportunity to change lives. Your commitment to learn about the complex issues of poverty is most notable, and your role in assisting people moving out of poverty is an honorable choice. Maybe you are already a hero to many, or perhaps you are new to the helping field. Either way, the Poverty Institute is designed to increase your "Poverty Competency." You will learn strategies for understanding, motivating, educating and communicating more effectively with people who are fighting poverty.

We will have an interactive two days of learning. During this time, we want you to have fun, learn, connect and collaborate with colleagues coming from diverse communities, such as education, justice, health, and social service organizations across the country.

As we learn together, let us affirm our goal for this Poverty Institute, to truly make a difference for people who are fighting that evil villain, poverty. May we collaborate and be motivated to make a difference for children and families. We celebrate your presence and recognize that your inspiration can serve to be the difference that touches the hearts and minds of people who live in poverty conditions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Donna M. Beegle

## About Donna

Donna M. Beegle, Ed.D., is a highly experienced national public speaker, discussion leader, and trainer as well as the author of **See Poverty... Be the Difference**, a resource book for professionals who work with people in poverty. For nearly twenty-three years, Donna has provided education and materials for breaking poverty barriers. Donna's story and her work on poverty are being featured in an PBS documentary titled Invisible Nation. Her experience of living in poverty, combined with research and education on "what works," make her uniquely qualified to work with organizations and individuals seeking to improve the lives of people living in poverty.

Donna grew up in generational migrant labor poverty, left school for marriage at fifteen, had two children, and continued to cope. At twenty-five, she found herself with no husband, little education, and no job skills. What followed in ten short years were: self-confidence, a G.E.D., an A.A. in journalism, a B.A. (with honors) in communications, a Master's degree in communication with a minor in gender studies (with honors), and completion of doctoral coursework. In 2000, Donna completed her doctorate in Educational Leadership at Portland State University, where she taught speech communication courses. She is currently president of Communication Across Barriers, a consulting firm devoted to improving outcomes for people living in poverty.



***Dr. Donna M. Beegle,  
National Poverty Expert***



# Poverty Institute Overview

## Why attend this Poverty Institute?

Two facts: 1) Poverty is growing. 2) People today are less likely to move out of poverty than in the 1940s.

“I was born into a family of migrant labor workers who were mostly illiterate. My poverty experiences taught me that no one cares about people in poverty. What I realized when I was getting my education was that it wasn't helping professionals and others who were making it did not care. It was that they did not know. When I read the literature on poverty, I couldn't find my family's perspectives or experiences. What I did find were a lot of stereotypes about poverty, its causes, and the students and families who live in it. I learned we graduate professionals from college without having poverty competency.” ~ Donna Beegle.



## This Institute is about gaining “Poverty Competency.”

Poverty competency is having a comprehensive understanding of poverty and the skills to effectively eradicate its impacts. It is knowing the history and structural causes of poverty to ensure that you are operating from facts, not stereotypes. Poverty competency is understanding the complexities of poverty and how many different life experiences are labeled “poverty.” It is knowing that working-class poverty experiences are different from situational poverty experiences or generational poverty experiences. It is understanding that students and families are struggling in a war zone. It is about operating on the assumption that people are making the best decisions they can within the “shoes” they are wearing. It is creating relationships based on identification so people can see they are not so different from those who are educated. It is fostering a climate where everyone belongs, has knowledge, and has opportunities to shine. It is implementing a curriculum that includes the life experiences of people living in poverty, without punishing oral-culture and relational styles of giving and receiving information. Completing this Poverty Institute will provide you with concrete tools for making a difference for those living in poverty in your community.

## How can you use this learning guide?

This learning guide serves as a reference throughout this training and provides you with a take-away tool for sharing with colleagues and implementing in your work. It is designed to be used in a number of ways:

- Preview the learning guide to introduce yourself to the content and flow of the conference.
- Use the concepts to take notes during and after the Institute.
- Save the document to use as a desk reference, to refer to key strategies in the future.
- Use your notes to promote discussion among staff, students and families in your community.
- Watch for “Beegle Bites,” tips, strategies and ideas for working with people in poverty.

Poverty competency includes four components: 1) a deeper understanding of poverty, its history, causes and current national and local facts; 2) awareness of your own attitudes, beliefs and values about poverty and the people who live in it; 3) skill sets for communicating and relating more effectively across poverty barriers; 4) having strong internal and external partnerships to take a collective approach.



# Learning Objectives

The Communication Across Barriers Poverty Institute addresses theory, best practices, and practical strategies for working and communicating more effectively with people who live in the crisis of poverty. It is intended for professionals who work directly with people living in poverty, managers of organizations, policy and program developers, and others who want to make a difference in their communities. The curriculum is designed to provide a deeper understanding of poverty and its impacts on people, and guide you in gaining a better understanding of your own social-class experiences. You will gain invaluable tools to take back to your organization to promote systemic change and increase success outcomes in your community.



## Learning Objectives:

- Discuss the impact of poverty on self-confidence, motivation, and expectations.
- Understand how poverty in the U.S. is internalized as a personal deficiency.
- Describe social class differences in priorities, language, and relationships.
- Understand how to develop a welcoming environment and develop meaningful relationships.
- Explain the difference between immigrant poverty and generational poverty the U.S.
- Discuss the confounding issues of race and poverty to better assist people in moving forward.
- Explain the barriers perceived by people in poverty when dealing with those not in poverty.
- Understand how to implement changes in communication, teaching, and learning styles to enhance connections and success.
- Discuss ways to motivate and provide meaningful incentives to people fighting poverty.
- Demonstrate ability to build a “full resource backpack” for assisting people to move out and stay out of poverty.
- Obtain techniques for understanding and valuing oral and print culture communication styles.
- Understand how to focus and build on the assets of oral culture students and families instead of only seeing problems.
- Understand how to include oral culture learning styles in programs, policy, and curriculum.
- Explain how to overcome misunderstanding that can arise when diverse communication and learning styles are present.
- Discuss why oral culture orientation is a main determinant of poverty.
- Describe how to assist people in gaining print culture skills necessary to be successful in education and the workplace.
- Evaluate programs, curriculum, and climate for inclusiveness of oral culture communicators.

# Guiding Facts

**Helping professionals and citizens who want to make a difference for people living in poverty must be clear about the following:**

- One person can make a world of difference.
- Our society has not taught us about poverty. Overwhelmingly, what we know about poverty are stereotypes and judgment. We need education, a new paradigm and real actions that will assist us in breaking poverty barriers.
- The goal of our work should be to assist students and families fighting poverty to connect to resources and authentic opportunities for success.
- Growing up in poverty does cause pain, and the environment impacts a person's ability to develop to his or her full potential. However, people are dynamic, not static. Resources, opportunities, and connections can assist people to succeed in education, employment and life. Poverty hurts, but it does not leave a "deficient" person who needs to be fixed. Poverty is deficient, but people are incredible and have many strengths to contribute to their growth.
- Our attempts to assist should be based on the assumption that people living in poverty can learn, grow, and move forward. They can achieve big dreams and strive for excellence especially when we meet them where they are and provide the support and opportunities they need.
- To break poverty barriers, we must move away from a scarcity model and build a comprehensive approach that includes both resources and opportunities.
- We should not lower expectations for students and families fighting poverty, but raise our expectations and build the supports necessary for success.



**When working with people in poverty, you are planting seeds. Some people may blossom before your eyes, while others need more time to grow and may not bloom until later, when you are no longer a part of their life. But the seeds YOU plant now are critical to their growth.**



# What Poverty Teaches

Your life experiences shape who you are -- the way you communicate, what you are motivated by, your perception of others and what you believe is possible for yourself. There are different kinds of life experiences called poverty that shape worldview and behavior. The chart below summarizes the worldview of four different kinds of poverty in the United States.

Generational Poverty	Working-Class Poverty
<b>Life Outlook:</b>  “Life happens to me, and I don’t have any control over it.”	<b>Life Outlook:</b>  “I have some control over my life, but not very much.”
Situational Poverty	Immigrant Poverty
<b>Life Outlook:</b>  “I pulled myself out of poverty. If I did it, anyone can—you just have to make better choices, work harder, and make sacrifices.”	<b>Life Outlook:</b>  “I have the power to make a better life for me and my family.”

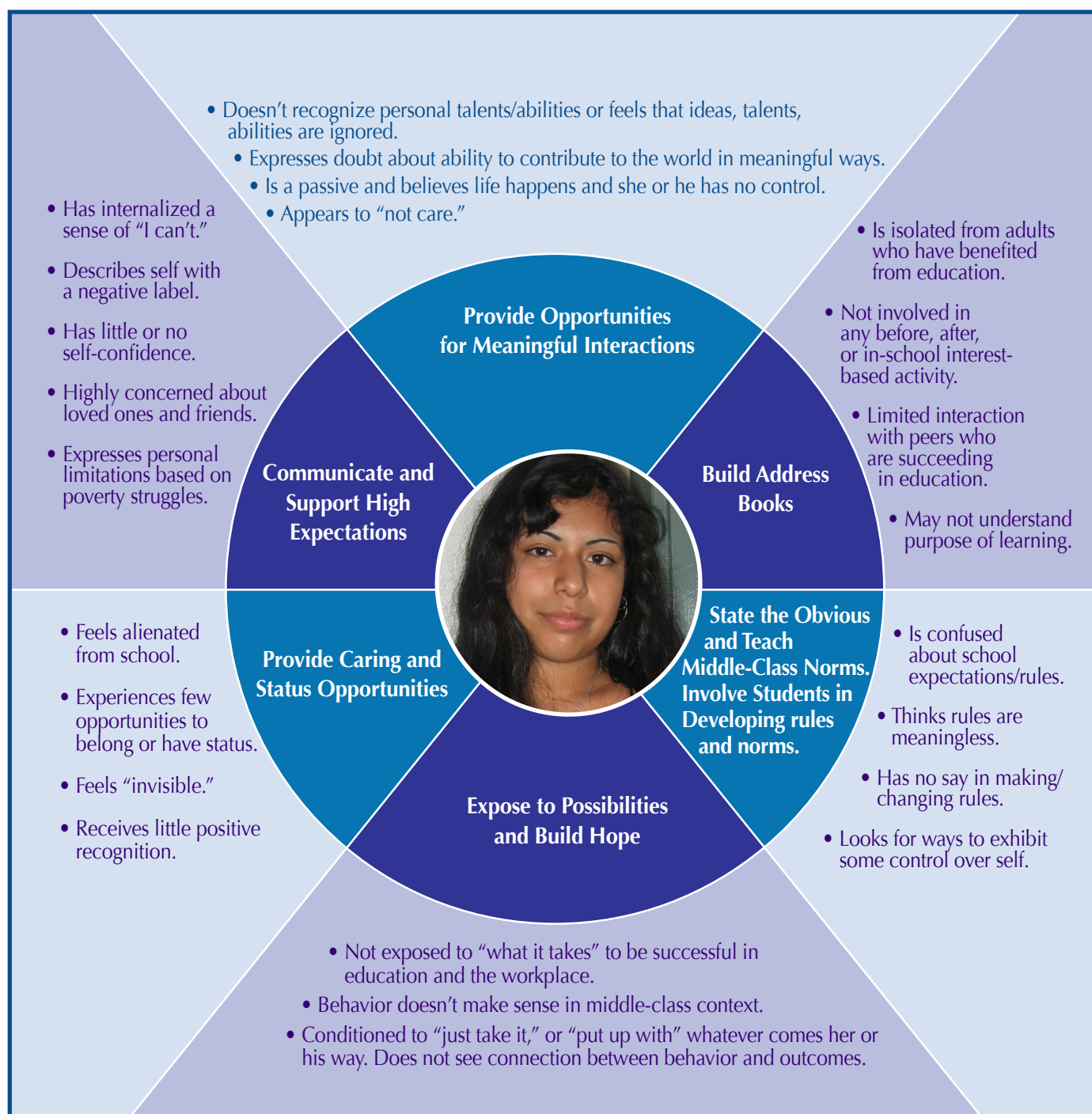
## Generational Poverty Teaches:

- No one cares.
- You and those you love are a problem.
- You are dirty and not welcome.
- Your way is wrong. You must change and act middle class.
- Do whatever it takes to survive.
- Be tough—give off an aura of violence to protect yourself.
- People work hard, but never move up.
- Illegal or impulsive activity can reap immediate relief and help with crisis needs.
- Life happens to you. There’s no sense in trying because nothing ever changes.
- Voting does not put food on the table, and besides, “those” people are going to do what they want to do.
- Education means stress and more pressures on the family.
- You may get something nice, but you do not get to keep it. Things get taken away.
- No matter how hard you try, nothing changes; there is no hope.
- You are not a person without material items and money.
- Those making it are better and smarter than you.



# Worldview of people impacted by poverty!

The outer part of the circle is the typical worldview of many people growing up in generational poverty. The inner circle is what the person needs to be engaged and successful. Do you see how the disadvantages create barriers and perpetuate the cycle of poverty in America?



Lynda Coates, 2008



# Worldview of people who succeed in Education!

The outer part of the circle is the typical worldview of many people growing up in families that have been educated for generations and have all their basic needs met. The inner circle identifies the advantages they have that allows them to be successful.



Lynda Coates, 2008

# Reflection Activity

Now it is time for you to examine your take-aways. This activity will give you a chance to reflect on what you have learned and a moment to start a “to-do” list for how you can apply this learning when you get back to your work

**Please use the following list of questions to help stimulate your thoughts.**

- What was the most powerful statement or moment for you today? Why do you think it made such an impact?
- Describe three new things you learned today. For each one, list at least one person you can share this information with and one way you will apply this new learning to your work with people in poverty or your personal life.
- What do you still want to know about the topics addressed earlier today? For each question you have, consider writing up a “Dying to Know” sticky note to post on the board (these will be addressed by the speakers tomorrow).
- Identify an idea or statement that confused or frustrated you, or one with which you disagreed. Try to describe what it was that created this reaction in you, and what you can do to resolve it.
- What are some “next steps” for you as a result of what you have experienced so far at this training?

Because not all individuals process information in the same way, if you would like to express your learning or actions in a unique/creative way, please do so. Feel free to draw, write a poem, compose a song, or express yourself any way that will best represent your learning.



**Life experiences shape who we are, what motivates us, and what we believe is possible for our own selves.**



# YOUR NOTES



A series of horizontal lines for writing notes, consisting of 25 lines in total, evenly spaced across the page.

# Oral and Print Communication

Walter Ong first reported a difference in communication styles based on socioeconomic status (SES) in his book *Orality and Literacy* (1982). My research supported Ong's findings (Beegle, 2000 & 2004). People in poverty overwhelmingly communicate in an oral, word-of-mouth style, while people from more privileged classes tend to communicate in a more linear, print style. Both styles have value. Print helps us succeed in education and the work world. Oral culture styles fosters relationships and keeps people connected to each other. We need both sets of skills so we can use the characteristics appropriate to the situation. Incorporating both styles in your work is a powerful key to improving communication and outcomes for people living in poverty.

As you read through the characteristics below, think about your own styles for communicating, learning and relating. What communication, relationship and learning style do you teach, reward, and honor?

## Characteristics of Oral Culture



- Relationships - People are priority and at the heart of everything.
- Spontaneous - Strong desire for variety. Ability to "go with the flow" or jump from subject to subject.
- Repetitive - Storytelling and repeating information are important for maintaining the knowledge.
- Holistic - Focus on the "BIG picture" tendency to take everything that is going on around them.
- Comfortable with Emotions - Shows emotion readily in most any situation.
- Present Oriented - Highly in-tune with the here-and now.
- Agonistic - More physical.

## Characteristics of Print Culture



- Time - Is at the heart of everything and has high priority in daily activities.
- Linear - Organizes thought and actions by "first this, then this" process.
- Analytic/Abstract - Knowledge is outside of self; ability to separate self from what is going on.
- Self-Disciplined/Focused - Strong ability to shut out sensory data and focus on one idea at a time.
- Strategic - Ability to plan ahead, set goals and focus on the future.
- Delay Gratification - Ability to break things into parts promotes the ability to connect small efforts to end desires

**Connect with people through oral culture communication first. Honor them, build identification, and find common ground. Show you value the relationship you have with them. Then help them obtain the print skills they need to succeed in education and the world of work.**





## Closing the Communication Gap

In the United States, we tend to place value on the print culture communication, relating, and learning characteristics, while oral culture characteristics are devalued. The majority of our institutions (schools, businesses, etc.) are set up in a way that honors, validates, and serves people with print-culture skills. We send important information in flyers, handouts and letters. We write notes on students' papers instead of talking with them.

In poverty and in most other countries, there is more value placed on the oral culture style of communicating, relating, and learning. Print culture communication and learning characteristics are not "better" or more important. The ideal is to understand the different styles and communicate in a balanced way. We lose talent and potential by shutting out the gifts of oral culture and focusing only on print-culture styles of learning and communicating. We have to find ways in our schools and organizations (which are largely print culture) to establish, value, and include some of the oral-culture styles of communicating and learning. We must move to models that honor oral-culture styles of communicating, while teaching the skills of print culture.

Effective communication is a necessary step toward eradicating the barriers to success for people to move out of poverty. Effective communication cannot be achieved without educating all people on ways to broaden their repertoire and develop their less dominant style of learning and communicating.

## Strive for Balance

Many people who are print-culture communicators lose touch with their natural style of communicating and become so dominant in the print culture that they struggle to acquire some of the characteristics that oral culture people exhibit readily, such as the ability to develop relationships and to be in the moment. Likewise, people who stay steeped in their oral culture struggle with print culture characteristics, such as having difficulty breaking things into manageable steps or planning ahead. Poverty compounds this because you often plan ahead and then do not have the resources to follow through.

Walter Ong (1982) strongly emphasizes that one style of communicating and learning is not better than the other. To be truly effective communicators, he argued, people need to have the skills from both oral and print cultures. Furthermore, he says the ideal communication style is to be balanced; having the ability to maintain both the characteristics of oral culture (which keeps one connected and spontaneous) and the characteristics of print culture (which allows one to set goals, plan ahead, analyze and stay focused). For example, if you need to be more relational, you can tap into your oral culture skills. If you need to be on time more often, you can tap into your print-culture abilities.

**For oral culture communicators, interrupting is not rude. It is adding information and participating in the conversation. In the literature on oral and print communication styles, "interrupting" is called an "additive."**



# Communication Quiz

Communication is most effective when we use a balance between the two styles. If you are too dominant in print culture communication style (one-idea-at-a-time, linear, etc.), you may focus so much on the task that you neglect building and maintaining relationships with those you serve. You may also be losing the attention of oral communicators who are used to multiple ideas and multi-sensory inputs. On the other hand, if you are too dominant with an oral culture communication style, you probably have great rapport with those you work with, but they may not be gaining guidance in the print culture skills they need to succeed in education and the work world. The tool below can assist you in exploring your dominant style of communication. It can also provide you with insights for developing strategies to better connect and serve those you work with.



**Instructions:** Read each statement on the chart and write your score in the box to the right of the statement. Answer the questions according to how you communicate with people, even if it is not your natural or preferred way of communicating (for example, you may have trained yourself to communicate in a certain way because of work demands or training, even though you would prefer to do things differently). Rate each statement on a scale of 1-5 depending on how much the statement describes your behavior.

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>1. No</b>         | <b>This statement does not describe my style</b>         |
| <b>2. Mostly Not</b> | <b>This statement is mostly not true for me</b>          |
| <b>3. Sometimes</b>  | <b>Half the time, this statement is true for me</b>      |
| <b>4. Mostly Yes</b> | <b>This statement captures my style most of the time</b> |
| <b>5. Yes</b>        | <b>This statement describes my style</b>                 |

**Add the score in each column.**

- If the two totals are close to the same number, congratulations! Walter Ong would say you are a balanced communicator.
- If you have a 20 percent higher score in either oral or print communication, then you may be more dominant in that style of communication.
- If you are more dominant in one style over the other, examine how you can gain and implement the skills in needed to achieve balance for communicating and relating more effectively.
- If you scored higher on oral, read the print strategies and begin incorporating them into your communication.
- If you scored higher on print, read the oral strategies and begin incorporating them into your communication.

14

Poverty Institute

# Oral and Print Quiz

Creating a welcoming environment is a priority. I set the tone by noticing people, learning their names and talking about interests.		Getting the task done is a priority over small talk. If there is time afterwards, I will engage in friendly conversation.	
Relationships are more important than rules or procedures. I put people first.		I prefer to follow the rules and I think everyone else should do the same.	
I like to talk in groups and it doesn't bother me when people are interrupting each other. It is fun.		I prefer to have conversations that are one-on-one with another person, rather than talk with several people at once in a group.	
I am drawn to information when there is a human element to it about real life people.		I prefer to get straight to the facts and data, without listening to a long story.	
I like to work in groups, socialize, and learn from others, even though it may be noisy from conversations.		I learn best when I can be alone and there is no noise or interruptions.	
I enjoy conversations about people's lives as opposed to ideas.		I enjoy talking about ideas, rather than conversation about people and their lives.	
I need frequent reminders about places I have to be and things I must do.		I rarely miss an appointment or fail to complete a task.	
In conversations, I pay attention to facial expressions, body posture and tone of voice more than the content of what is being said.		In conversation, I mostly pay attention to ideas and concepts and have a less focus on how others are feeling.	
I prefer hands-on learning. I want to experiment and try things while I am learning.		I like to gather facts and data and first analyze it before I take any action.	
I have a schedule, but rarely stick to it because things are always coming up.		I strictly adhere to my schedule.	
When I need information for living my life, I'll ask someone I trust who is like me.		When I need information for living my life, I'll research the internet or read a book on the topic.	
I am comfortable showing my emotions and enjoy giving people hugs and friendly touch.		I only show emotion to close family and friends and am not comfortable getting physically close to people I don't know well.	
I am comfortable talking about my personal lifewith most anyone. I have nothing to hide.		I do not share personal information or stories with people unless there is a clear purpose for it.	
<b>Total</b>		<b>Total</b>	

\* All rights reserved. Copyright 2008, Reprint with permission only. [www.combarriers.com](http://www.combarriers.com)

# What Works

We have explored what poverty teaches and how it impacts motivation, expectations, learning, relationships and communication. You have learned that poverty teaches people that they are deficient. People get strong messages that poverty is their fault and that their IQs are measured by whether or not they understand the middle-class vocabulary, communication styles, experiences, subject matter, and norms. You have the power to introduce new perspectives by practicing the strategies below. These strategies can empower people in taking risks and stepping out of their comfort zones to try new things that can move them forward.

- Create a welcoming environment that fosters belonging.
- Acknowledge people frequently; make sure they know you notice them.
- Give genuine positive feedback frequently.
- Meet people where they are. Focus on their strengths and build on them.
- Teach people there are real causes for poverty: lack of access to affordable housing, living wage jobs, child care, transportation, mental and physical abuse, etc. Assist people in externalizing the blame and letting go of the shame that poverty teaches.
- Make sure the motivators you use are truly what motivates them, not what you want them to be motivated by.
- Make learning and growth steps relevant; use examples to which they can relate.
- Provide experiential, hands-on learning. Model the behavior and walk people through unfamiliar places or activities. Do not tell me, show me.
- Help people build their address books; introduce them to people who can provide resources and opportunities.
- Set people up for success; build internal and external capacity.
- Give people opportunities to be the expert, to help you, or to shine.
- Inform students and adults that they don't have to be perfect to go to college.



**If you are judging, you cannot connect. If you cannot connect, you cannot communicate. If you cannot communicate, you cannot educate. If you cannot educate, you cannot eradicate poverty.**





# Research-based Strategies

Theory	Navigating Practices
1. Strengths Perspective Approach: Every individual has strengths. You can empower people by focusing on what is good about them, what they do know and what skills they have now.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stand in awe. Believe everyone has knowledge and skills.</li> <li>• Tell people what you believe is good about them.</li> <li>• Find ways for people to shine. Learn about their skills and ask them to contribute. Help them feel included and needed.</li> <li>• Tell people you are happy to see them (even when they are late or have not met a deadline); help them feel wanted and valued.</li> <li>• Practice showing empathy instead of sympathy (no one wants pity or judgment).</li> </ul>
2. Resiliency Theory: Resiliency is the ability to cope and continue functioning, despite experiencing stress and adversity. It is not a personal trait. Professionals can help people develop resiliency by focusing on what is good about the person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat people special. Point out them what is unique about them.</li> <li>• Provide daily opportunities for people to be “right” or to “shine.”</li> </ul>
3. Asset Theory: The more assets a person has, both internal (conflict resolution skills, sense of purpose, etc.) and external (housing, transportation, etc.), the more likely they will succeed. For children, the Search Institute has identified 40 developmental assets that help enhance success. To down-load, go to <a href="http://www.search-institute.org/developmental_assets">www.search-institute.org/developmental_assets</a> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn what assets a person has and what services or opportunities are needed; connect them to those resources.</li> <li>• Build partnerships in your community so you know where to find resources.</li> <li>• Help people navigate the middle-class world. Make phone calls; offer to assist them with filling out paperwork; explain complex information in simple terms.</li> <li>• Teach people how to advocate for themselves. Tell them what questions to ask, explain how systems work, etc.</li> <li>• Role play next steps.</li> </ul>
4. Social Capital Theory: No one does everything by themselves. Those who are successful have connections with others who support them in various ways. People in poverty need the same kind of support; they need meaningful relationships with others who are educated and have resources to support them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce people to others who have benefited from education.</li> <li>• Tell people about opportunities (programs, events, etc.) that you know will put them in a place to build relationships with people who are educated.</li> <li>• Make connections face-to-face, instead of giving phone numbers or a “list” of people/agencies to call.</li> <li>• Help people obtain all the tools, resources and knowledge they need to feel like they “belong” (clothes, materials, knowledge of etiquette, etc).</li> <li>• Give people address books and your contact information!</li> </ul>
5. Faulty Attribution Theory: The act of attributing motives to someone else’s behavior without discovering the “why” behind their actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withhold judgment.</li> <li>• Understand people are doing the best they can with the information and perspectives they possess.</li> <li>• Remind yourself that your experiences and worldview may be different from those you serve.</li> <li>• Attempt to find out the “why” behind behavior.</li> </ul>

# Building Relationships, Navigating

Who had an impact on you when you were growing up? How many people can you think of that influenced you, made a positive impression, guided you, helped you, gave you compliments, encouraged you and believed in your ability to succeed?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

Everyone can benefit from having a mentor guide and support them as they are becoming educated or entering the workforce, but this is especially true for people who are living in poverty. Research on people who grew up in poverty and later became successful shows that most of them had people in their lives who helped them “Navigate” the middle class world (Beegle, 2000; Levine and Nidiffer, 1996). Moving out of poverty is not due to being “born smarter” or simply “trying harder” than others, as the Hollywood rags-to-riches movies would like you to believe. People in poverty move up when they develop meaningful, supportive relationships with professionals who help them feel like they belong in a middle-class environment. Building a relationship with a person living in poverty can be the most helpful thing you can do for helping someone move forward.

Most people living in poverty cannot bring to mind even one person who is making it who believes in them. Do you believe those you are serving can get out of poverty? If not, they know it. You do not have to say it. Most of communication is non-verbal and your non-verbals signals will quickly alert them that you do not believe in them. Understand and teach that what we know now is not all we can know. Help those you serve to understand that poverty often doesn’t allow for the privilege of learning and that the learning gaps can be overcome. Intelligence is dynamic, not fixed. All people can learn if we build in the supports. They can develop a second language (middle-class academic language) and learn behavior norms that set them up for success in the workplace and in the educational system. These are just a few strategies of effective mentors. The following page outlines characteristics of effective mentors and strategies for building relationships with people in poverty to help them move forward.

**Examine rules and policies to make sure they are not punishing people for their poverty conditions (e.g., How many people are on time to an appointment at school when they are in crisis? What are your policies for those in the crisis of poverty who are late?).**



# Characteristics of Effective Mentors

Below are characteristics of effective Mentors (Beegle, 2000; Levine and Niddifer, 1996) and the corresponding strategies for being a navigator to someone in poverty.

## **Believe in the person's ability to get out of poverty.**

- Treat every person as if their potential is unknown.
- Tell people many times, in many ways, that you believe in them, think they are smart, and have skills and talents and can learn more.
- Find ways to help them understand that what they currently know is not all they can know.

## **Believe the person has strengths and talents.**

- Practice a strengths-based approach; look for what is good and right about the people.
- Build on their current knowledge and skills. Suggest programs, classes or activities that can help them move forward.
- Remember that they may not know middle-class experiences, but they know a lot. Tell them what is good about them.
- Set people up for success. Make sure they have all the resources needed (transportation, clothes, etiquette, etc.) to participate in the programs you suggest.

## **Know the benefits of connecting people to others who can provide resources and opportunities.**

- Introduce people to others who have benefited from education or who have moved up in a job.
- Help people in poverty understand that those who are educated are not “better,” they just have had different experiences and opportunities.
- Help people feel a sense of “belonging” among new environments and new people.
- Connect people to professionals who share their interests.

## **Know how to connect people to assets needed to succeed.**

- Understand people need supports to succeed; no one does everything alone.
- Give information, examples, and supports to build internal (self-confidence, hope) and external capacity (supplies, knowledge, transportation, etc.).
- For youth, visit the Search Institute online and download “The 40 Developmental Assets.”

## **Know how to navigate middle-class systems, procedures, and paperwork.**

- Help find and connect people to resources and opportunities needed and to those who can help.
- Assist with filling out paperwork, applications for services or programs, connecting to internships, etc.
- Role play how to advocate for themselves (find resources, ask questions).



# YOUR NOTES



A series of horizontal lines for writing notes, consisting of 25 lines in total. Each line is a thin, light blue horizontal stroke.



# What Money?

## A Bill Paying Activity



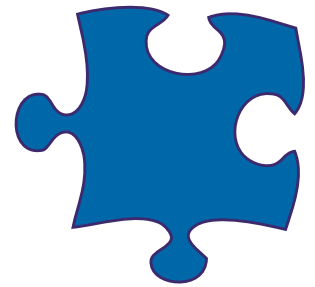
	Amount	Paid	Comment
<b>Monthly Income (after taxes)</b>	<b>\$1307</b>		
Apartment Rent	\$750		
Birthday Party Gift: Your child invited to a friend's party	\$10		
Cable Television	\$25		
Car Insurance: Final notice	\$150		
Day-care: For two kids	\$400		
Diapers: Out of diapers	\$15		
Electric Bill: Final notice before shut off	\$250		
Field Trip: Activity fee and sack lunch-teacher needs chaperones	\$10		
Gasoline	\$100		
Groceries	\$400		
Garbage Service	\$39		
Health Insurance: Working for a small company, you have option of buying family health insurance	\$900		
Laundromat	\$30		
Phone Bill	\$49		
Rent to Own Payment	\$25		
Shampoo and Soap: Out of both	\$6		
Shoes: Child has outgrown their shoes	\$20		
Snacks for School: Your child's week to supply store-bought snacks for class	\$40		
Toilet Paper: Out of toilet paper	\$8		
Water Bill: Final notice before shut off	\$90		

## Reflections on Bill Paying Activity

*Recognizing that this is a simulated activity and cannot fully compare the experience of not having enough, please respond to the following questions:*

- How did it feel to have so few resources to take care of the needs of your family?
- How did you prioritize what you were going to pay and what you were going to ignore?
- If the bill was something your children needed/wanted, how did you explain your decisions to them?
- How could you manage your money to make things work better for you?
- How could you make life better for yourself and your family?

# Learning Styles Explored



My research revealed that people living in poverty overwhelmingly got their information from other people, not from reading. They took information for living their lives from people they trusted and saw as “like” them. Walter Ong’s Oral and Print Culture models of communication and relationship styles support my research. Ong found in world-wide studies with people living in poverty that the dominant communication and relationship styles were Oral Culture or “word of mouth” styles. Ong discovered poverty conditions reinforced the characteristics of Oral culture (e.g., focus on relationships, spontaneity, present-oriented). Middle class people overwhelmingly got information from print or reading. The way you get your information for living your life shapes your communication, learning and relationship styles. Understanding the two distinct styles of communication (Oral and Print) enables helping professionals to improve communication and relationships with those they serve.

Like differences in communication and relationship styles, research is clear that humans also have different learning styles. If we are presenting information for people to use to move out and stay out of poverty, it is a great asset to understand both the characteristics of Oral and Print Cultures and of different learning styles. David Kolb is well known for his development of a model for us to better understand how people learn.

Kolb’s learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles (or preferences). The model offers a way to understand individuals’ different learning styles. Ong’s Orality and Literacy communication and relationship model emphasized that people living in poverty tend to be more Oral Culture communicators and learners. In my research, participants from generational poverty tended to exhibit Concrete Experience and or Active Experimentation as their dominant learning styles.

Kolb says that ideally the learner goes through all four styles (experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting) to achieve the fullest learning experiences. Immediate or concrete experiences lead to observations and reflections. These reflections are then assimilated (absorbed and translated) into abstract concepts with implications for action which the person can actively test and experiment with, and which in turn enable the creation of new experiences.

## **Kolb’s Model, a four-stage cycle with multiple ways of learning:**

1. Concrete Experience – (CE) Feeling: The learner succeeds when emotions are tied to the learning objective.
2. Reflective Observation – (RO) Watching: The learner is adept at watching the desired behavior or skill to learn.
3. Abstract Conceptualization – (AC) Thinking: The learner gains information by being abstractly introduced to a concept and pondering it.
4. Active Experimentation – (AE) Doing: The learner excels with hands-on practice with the behavior or concepts.

# Learning Styles Explored

This survey will help you determine how you learn best, your individual learning style. For each numbered set, rank them each in order (4, 3, 2, 1) of your personal preference. Use “4” for the description that suits you the best then down through “1” for the description that describes you the least. There are no right or wrong answers.

	CE	RO	AC	AE
1	___ get involved	___take my time before acting	___ particular about what I like	___ like things to be useful
2	___ open to experience	___look at all sides of issues	___like to analyze things, break them down into parts	___ like to try things out
3	___ like to deal with my feelings	___ like to watch	___ like to think about ideas	___ like to be doing things
4	___ accept people and situations the way they are	___ aware of what is going on around me	___ evaluate things	___ take risks
5	___have gut feelings, hunches	___ have a lot of questions	___ am logical	___ am hard working
6	___ prefer concrete things that I can see and touch	___ like to observe	___ like ideas and theories	___ enjoy being active
7	___ prefer learning in the here and now	___ like to consider things and reflect about them	___ tend to think about the future	___ like to see results from my work
8	___ rely on my feelings	___ rely on my observations	___ rely on my ideas	___ have to try things out for myself
9	___ am energetic and enthusiastic	___ am quiet and reserved	___ tend to reason things out	___ am responsible

Add your points and see in which column you ranked the highest. If you are tied in two columns, you have two dominant styles of learning. In my research, people in generational poverty and working class had dominant learning styles that were Concrete Experience and Active Experimentation. Like any personality test, it is important to recognize that people are complex and may not “fit” the test. Kolb’s Learning Styles Inventory is a helpful tool for understanding and promoting conversation about how you and those you serve best learn. This knowledge provides you with the power to customize your work in ways that better break poverty barriers.

Modified and Adapted from Kolb’s Learning Styles, 1984

# Learning Style Descriptions

## CE

### Concrete Experience

A high score on Concrete Experience represents a receptive, experience-based approach to learning that relies heavily on feeling-based judgments. High CE individuals tend to be empathetic and “people-oriented.” They generally find theoretical approaches to be unhelpful and prefer to treat each situation as a unique case. They learn best from specific examples in which they can become involved. Individuals who emphasize Concrete Experience tend to be oriented more towards peers and less toward authority in their approach to learning, and benefit most from feedback and discussion with fellow CE learners.

## AE

### Active Experimentation

A high score on Active Experimentation indicates an active, “doing” orientation to learning that relies heavily on experimentation. Those who score high on AE learn best when they can engage in activities, such as hands-on projects, homework, or small group discussions. They dislike passive learning situations such as lectures. These individuals tend to be extroverts and enjoy working in teams and communicating with other people to facilitate their learning.

## AC

### Abstract Conceptualization

A high score on Abstract Conceptualization indicates an analytical, conceptual approach to learning that relies heavily on logical thinking and rational evaluation. High AC individuals tend to be oriented more towards things and symbols and less toward other people. They learn best in authority-directed, impersonal learning situations that emphasize theory and systematic analysis. They are frustrated by and benefit little from unstructured “discovery” learning approaches like exercises and simulations.

## RO

### Reflective Observation

A high score on Reflective Observation indicates a tentative, impartial and reflective approach to learning. High RO individuals rely heavily on careful observation in making judgments, and prefer learning situations such as lectures that allow them to take the role of impartial objective observers. These individuals tend to be introverts.

**People living in poverty need as many people in their address book who are not living in poverty as they have who are living in poverty. It is those mentors who serve as navigators to resources and opportunities that make the difference.**





# YOUR NOTES



A series of horizontal lines for writing notes, consisting of 25 lines in total. Each line is a thin, light blue horizontal stroke.

# What We Want You to Take Away

The goal of this work is to make a difference for people who live in poverty. We want people to have true opportunities to lead full lives and to reach their potential. Below are the major points from the training that can empower you to be the difference.

- The context of poverty teaches people a world-view that is different than the context of middle-class or wealth. We have to meet people where they are and expose them to possibilities.
- Poverty is often internalized as a personal deficiency. If people do not get strong messages that there are good things about them, they may not see hope or opportunity.
- Develop empathy for the experience of living in crisis situations and respect for the strength and resourcefulness they come to develop because of it.
- Behaviors and values are products of the social context that we live in and are not necessarily reflective of the kind of person we are. Suspend judgment and know that people are making the very best decisions that they can in their own contexts.
- What you have to do to help people move out of poverty may not be in your job title. You may not have been taught what to do through your education. Professionals must be clear about why they are doing the work they are doing. If you are clear that your work is to help people move forward, you are likely to do the right thing.
- Be vocal, motivated and committed to become a part of, or a driving force towards, transformative change to achieve equity and social justice and eradicate the causes of poverty.
- Realize that there is no easy way to achieve these goals. There is no “one thing” or “magic fix” for the complexities of poverty. The key to sustainable change lies in you and in your ability to challenge the status quo and recreate a new paradigm for working with people in poverty that is inclusive, compassionate, supportive and long-term.
- Work to create a movement in your community at three levels individual, professional, and community-wide.

**USE THIS INFORMATION TO PROMOTE DIALOGUE AND ACTION**

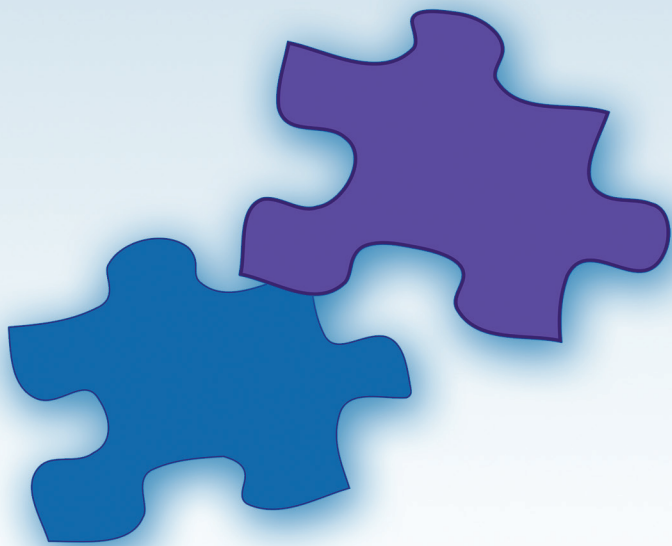
**Be the Difference!**



[www.combarriers.com](http://www.combarriers.com)

[www.facebook.com/donna.m.beegle](https://www.facebook.com/donna.m.beegle)

[twitter.com/donnabeegle](https://twitter.com/donnabeegle)



[www.combarriers.com](http://www.combarriers.com)  
[www.facebook.com/donna.m.beegle](https://www.facebook.com/donna.m.beegle)  
[twitter.com/donnabeegle](https://twitter.com/donnabeegle)

