

# **Educating Children of Poverty**

**Dr. Donna Beegle**

## **Contact Information**

Communication Across Barriers  
PO Box 23071  
Tigard, OR 97281-3071

Donna Beegle  
(503) 590-4599  
dbeegle@combarriers.com  
www.combarriers.com

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

# About Dr. Beegle

Donna M. Beegle, Ed.D. is a highly experienced National public speaker, discussion leader, trainer, and the author of articles providing insights and strategies for communicating more effectively across race, class, gender and generational barriers. Donna's inspiring story and work have been featured in newspapers around the nation, on local TV and on National programs such as PBS. Her book, *See Poverty: Be The Difference* is now available and Donna's work on poverty is being featured in a PBS Documentary titled: *Invisible Nation* in Sept. 06. Her personal history and her studies of communication, poverty, gender, and education make her uniquely qualified to work with organizations and individuals working to improve the lives of people living in poverty.

After growing up in generational poverty, leaving school for marriage at 15, having two children and continuing to cope with poverty, she found herself, at 25, with no husband, little education, and no job skills. What followed in 10 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 a Doctorate Degree.

Donna completed her Doctorate in Educational Leadership at Portland State University in 2000, where she taught speech communication courses for eight years. She is currently president of Communication Across Barriers, a consulting firm devoted to improving communication and relationships. Donna is also founder and CEO of the new nonprofit, PovertyBridge which is dedicated to changing lives for people in poverty.

Donna is available for workshops, curriculum development, organizational development and planning, and inspirational keynote presentations.

# Sessions

## Educating Students from Poverty

### Description

What does it mean to leave no child behind? What does it mean to be from poverty and to go to school in America? Through sharing her journey out of "generational poverty", findings from her doctoral research on generational poverty, successful completion of a Bachelor's degree, and fifteen years of working in schools struggling with educating students from poverty, Donna Beegle will frame the discussion of how to successfully engage students and families from generational poverty in the education process.

The following learning objectives will guide this portion of the program:

- Discuss the impact and meaning of education for students from generational poverty
- Understand how poverty in the U.S. is internalized as a personal deficiency
- Understand how to develop a welcoming climate and meaningful curriculum for students from poverty backgrounds
- Explain the difference between immigrant poverty and poverty in the U.S.
- Discuss the confounding of race and class issues in developing strategies for educating students from poverty
- Explain the barriers perceived by people in poverty when dealing with educators
- Understand how to implement changes in communication, teaching and learning styles to enhance educational success for students from poverty
- Discuss ways to motivate and provide meaningful incentives to students from poverty backgrounds
- Understand how to connect in meaningful ways to redefine the meaning and value of education
- Explain how to frame education goals from the perspective of students and families from poverty

# **Breaking Barriers: Tools for Working With Students and Families Living in Poverty**

## **Description**

Most of our educational systems are set up to support students and families coming from a print culture orientation and they often are alienating to students and families who have an oral cultural world-view. How we get our information shapes how we relate to one another and how we experience the world. Many people from generational poverty backgrounds get their information verbally...creating an "oral" culture thought process. Most students and families from middle-upper class backgrounds gain their information from reading...creating a "print" culture thought process. Understanding these different thought processes could improve teaching and learning and create a more inclusive school climate. Opportunities for education success are enormous when these concepts are understood and incorporated into every aspect of the education process.

Oral culture (orality) is a natural state in which we are highly attuned to our senses (touch, smell, sight, sound, and taste) and devote a great deal of attention to sensory information. Orality emphasizes our interconnection with the environment and the people in it. Some characteristics of orality are spontaneity, connectedness, present orientation, comfort with emotions, able to see "the big picture," and holistic.

Print Culture (literacy) is a learned way of relating to the world where people learn to process and analyze (breaking things down according to parts) information collected through sight, sound, hearing, touch, and smell according to categories, classifications, and styles of reasoning developed by reading. Some characteristics of print culture are: self-discipline (ability to not pay attention to everything that is going on around you, but rather to focus on a single idea), separation and disconnection, ability to delay gratification, ability to strategize and plan ahead, ability to set goals, ability to develop technology, ability to break things down into parts, and ability to organize efforts according to predetermined goals.

## **Learning Objectives**

- Obtain techniques for understanding and valuing oral and print culture 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 the curriculum
- Explain how to overcome misunderstandings that can arise when diverse communication and learning styles are present
- Discuss why poverty and oral culture orientation are main determinants of educational failure

# Print and Oral Culture

## Oral Culture

### Characteristics of Oral Culture

- *Relationships* are at the heart of everything and are first priority
- *Spontaneous* - Strong desire for variety, great abilities to "go with the flow" or jump from subject to subject with ease
- *Repetitive* - Storytelling and repeating the same thing over and over are important for maintaining the knowledge
- *Holistic* - Focus on the "BIG picture", tendency to take in everything that is going on around them
- *Comfort with Emotions* - Shows emotion readily in most any situation
- *Present Oriented* - Highly in-tune with the here-and-now
- *Agonistic* - More physical

### To Teach The Skills of Oral Culture

- Pay attention to intuition
- Focus on how you feel
- Practice active listening to build better relationships
- Practice empathy to gain insights into how you are like others

## Print Culture

### Characteristics of Print Culture

- *Linear* - Organizes thought and actions by "first this, then this" thought process
- *Time* - Is at the heart of everything and has high priority in daily activities
- *Analytic/Abstract* - Knowledge is outside of self, ability to step back from a situation and separate and disconnect self from what is going on
- *Self-disciplined/Focus* - Strong ability to shut out sense data and focus on one idea at a time
- *Ability to delay gratification* - Strong understanding of relationships between parts. Ability to strategize, plan ahead, set goals, and focus on the future. Abilities to break things into parts promotes abilities to connect small efforts to end desires

### To Teach The Skills of Print Culture

- Model reading as a primary resource for gaining important daily life information
- Create lists
- Practice sorting and categorizing
- Practice outlining important concepts from the concepts that you are studying

# Generational Poverty Survival Skills

The following are skills that you must know to survive in generational poverty.

## Place a check by the skills you already have.

- Do you know which church or agencies give free clothes and shoes?
- Do you know which church or agency has free clothes that are not holey and stained?
- Do you know which dumpsters you could get returnable cans and bottles from without being caught?
- Do you know how to show "Proof" that you live in a neighborhood that you really do not live in to get better services?
- Do you know which stores will let you get food and pay them later?
- Do you know how to give off an aura of violence to avoid trouble?
- Do you know how to fix a car without any money for parts or a mechanic to help?
- Do you know where to cash a check without any identification?
- Do you know where to get a loan on your car title?
- Would you know where to go for help if your utilities were being shut off?
- Do you know how to get free medicine samples at an emergency room if you are sick?
- Do you know how to move in half a day?
- Do you know how to use a butcher knife as a potato peeler?
- Do you know how to go days without food?
- Can you survive winter nights without heat?
- Do you know how to live without utilities or a telephone?
- Do you know how to cook without a stove?
- Do you know how to keep food cold without a refrigerator?
- Would you know how to laugh if you were hungry, being evicted and had nowhere to go?
- Do you know where to find a bail bondsman to get your relative out of jail?
- Can you drive illegally?
- Do you know how to use torn up clothing for toilet paper, sanitary napkins, etc.?
- Can you entertain a group of friends with your own talents, musical instruments, singing, and humor?
- Would you know what to do if you were being evicted and had no money to move?
- Do you know how to get tons of newspaper and cardboard to sell at recycle centers?
- Can you survive in jail or prison?
- Can you smoothly change the subject to avoid answering humiliating questions?
- Can you get by without garbage service?
- Do you know how to fix your toothache with super glue?
- Do you know how to get food stamps or welfare?
- Do you know how to wash clothes without money, laundry soap, or a machine?
- Do you know how to get a two-week supply of groceries home without transportation?
- Do you know the rules for visiting people in prison?
- Are you used to constant crisis; someone you love arrested, evicted, heat shut off, sick, kicked out of school, out of food and so on?
- Do you know how to wait for hours for health or social services in a waiting room filled with people who are hungry, homeless, sick, and desperate?
- Do you know how to find out what jail your relative has been taken to and the court dates?

# Defining Poverty

## Generational Poverty

- Family has never owned land
- Never knew anyone who benefited from education
- Never knew anyone who moved up or was respected in a job
- Highly mobile
- High family Illiteracy
- Focus is on making it through the day

## Working Class Poverty

- Working, but rarely have money for any extras
- Most do not own property
- Live paycheck to paycheck
- Few have health care
- Focus on making it two weeks or through the month
- Poverty seen as personal deficiency

## Immigrant Poverty

- Have little or no resources
- Language & culture barriers
- Seem to do better than those born into poverty in America
- Poverty viewed as a system problem

## Depression Era Poverty

- A time when the societal message was, “We are all in this together.”
- Poverty seen as society problem

## Middle Class Temporary/Situational Poverty

- Person grows up in stable environment
- Surrounded by people who are educated or able to earn a living wage
- Attends school regularly
- Has health care
- Has a crisis (health, Divorce, etc.) and income drops
- Generally is able to make it back to middle class
- Has not internalized the poverty as their own fault

# Successful Mentors

- Believe in the student they are working with
- Believe education is a way out of poverty
- Are bi-cultural:
  - Understand structural causes of poverty
  - Are aware of the history of poverty in the U.S.
  - Know poverty related facts about your community
  - Are able to suspend judgment
- Open their personal network to the students they are working with
- Teach students how to build a network



# Recommended Reading

Beegle, Donna (2000) Interrupting Generational Poverty: Factors Influencing Successful Completion of the Bachelor's Degree. Doctoral Dissertation, Portland State University

Beegle, Donna (October-November 2003) Ending the Silence of Generational Poverty. Talking Points ????

Gans, H. (1995). The war against the poor. New York: Basic Books.

Levine, A., & Nidiffer, J. (1996). Beating the odds: How the poor get to college. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Mortenson, T. (1991). Equity of higher education opportunity for women, Blacks, Hispanics, and low-income students (ACT Student Financial Aid Research Report Series). Iowa City: American College Testing Program.

Mortenson, T. (Ed.). (1993). Postsecondary education opportunity: The Mortenson report on public policy analysis of opportunity for postsecondary. Iowa City: American College Testing Program.

Mortenson, T. (1995). Postsecondary education opportunity: The Mortenson report on public policy analysis of opportunity for postsecondary education. Iowa City: American College Testing Program. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 390 368)

Mortenson, T. (1998, July/August). A conversation about diversity. *Academe*, 84(4), 42-43.

Mortenson, T., & Wu, Z. (1990). High school graduation and college participation of young adults by family income backgrounds 1970 to 1989. Iowa City: American College Testing Program.

Ong, W. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the world*. London: Methuen & Co., Ltd.