



Yardley Training & Consulting Presents

Communicating
Within the
Culture of Poverty

Participant Handout

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Learning Objectives:

Learn the differences between Oral and Print Cultures and how that may affect success outcomes.

Understand the context of poverty from the unique world-view of those in poverty.

Explore the differences in life experiences of various social classes and the crucial role they play in determining one's success.

Explore how to include Oral Culture learning styles when working with people from poverty backgrounds.

Excellent Resources!

See Poverty, Be the Difference—Donna Beegle

Bridges Out of Poverty—Ruby Payne

A Framework for Understanding Poverty—Ruby Payne

Movie “Food Stamped” - www.foodstamped.com

Movie “Poor Kids” - pbs.com (Frontline)

Movie “The Dust Bowl” a film by Ken Burns (PBS)



Let's Talk about Social and Economic Class Distinctions.....

- ***Generational Poverty***

- Property—rarely owned

- Education—not a lot of history of family success

- Highly Mobile

- Higher Rates of Illiteracy

- Focus is on the Day*

- Jobs—unstable and not a lot of promotion opportunity

- Stay in the Moment

- ***Working Class Poverty***

- Social Status Through Work

- Working but little money for ‘extras’

- Property—most do not own

- Living paycheck to paycheck

- Healthcare—few have access

- Focus is on making it to the next check*

- Poverty is seen as a personal deficiency

- ***Immigrant Poverty***

- Few or no resources

- Language and cultural barriers

- Seem to do better than “American-Born” poverty

- Poverty is viewed as a system problem

- After a period of time, adopts same outlook as Generational/Working Class

- ***Depression Era Poverty***

- We're all in this together!

- Poverty was viewed as a social problem

- Not internalized as a personal deficiency



- ***Middle Class Temporary/Situational Poverty***
 - Person grows up in a stable environment
 - Surrounded by people who have completed education and who are able to earn a living
 - Attends school regularly
 - Has access to health care
 - Crisis causes income to drop
 - Generally able to make it back to middle class over time
 - Poverty not internalized as their own fault
 - Often harshest judges of those remaining in poverty
- ***Middle Class***
 - Degree of economic independence but little social capital/power
 - Breadwinners usually have a higher degree of education/skills
 - Going to college is emphasized
 - Concerned about property values
 - Disposable income for entertainment/recreation
 - Upper Middle Class—hire people to care for the children.
- ***Owning Class Rich***
 - Income producing assets make work not necessary
 - Featured as “model citizens”
 - Travels widely throughout the year
 - Owns more than one home
 - Gives parties for celebrities, politicians and supports charities
- ***Ruling Class Rich***
 - Hold positions of power in institutions of society
 - May live secluded lives
 - Usually protected from the general public
 - Others often in charge of raising the children
 - Children are expected to be wealthy adults and hold prestigious positions of power



Within each class there exists a set of hidden rules.

People can and do move from one class to another but knowing, understanding and abiding by the hidden rules is key.

When you grow up in a particular class, those hidden rules become a part of who you are. Most people don't even think about the social rules they abide by daily.

What are the hidden rules for your place of work? For your home? For this training?



Culture of Poverty.....Oral Culture

- Relationships are the 1st Priority
- Relationships are based on identity (true for everyone)
- Spontaneous
- Repetition
- Everything is learned within a context
- Very comfortable with emotions. Expressing them when felt.
- Present oriented—here and now
- Interruption in conversation is normal and expected
- Lots of self-disclosure
- Primary sense organ is the **EAR**

Middle Class Values.....Print Culture

- Linear thought process
- Time based; future focused
- Analytical and abstract thinking skills
- Ability to separate and disconnect from emotions
- Things learned outside of personal context through reading
- Self disciplined/focused for long-term goals
- Ability to strategize for long-term goals
- Takes turns in communication
- Primary sense organ is the **EYE**



Oral Culture

(Pay Attention—this is important to understand!)

- People come first, not paper
- People from an oral culture of poverty look to emotions, facial expressions, gestures from those they communicate with as an indicator of caring and connection
- Strong desire for variety
- Entertainment is often a strong motivator/priority
- Different reality than Print Culture

What is your communication style?

Any revelations about your style?

When we get stressed or busy, we revert to working in our
DEFAULT communication style.

Your take away lesson: Be aware of your own style and be
conscious of when you need to adapt that style to meet the needs
of your customer.



Concepts That Poverty (or chronic crisis) Teaches....

- **Fate** ~ Life happens and there is no power to change it.
- **Failure** ~ It's inevitable.
- **Future** ~ It's unpredictable, unclear and often difficult and painful to envision. It's better to focus on today.
- **Job** ~ It means working long hours but it doesn't mean there will be enough money to cover rent and food. It takes us away from family.
- **Money** ~ To be used before it gets away as there's never enough anyway
- **Emotions** ~ Are expressed when they are felt. They show that you are genuine.
- **Police** ~ They often hurt the ones we love. They are unfriendly, out to get us and to be avoided.
- **Education** ~ Useless, for other people, not us. Causes additional stress because school is expensive.
- **Doctors** ~ Associated with being the bearers of bad news since we only see them when we are really ill or injured.
- **Dentists** ~ Evoke feelings of fear. Brushing and flossing are rules that other people made up.
- **Nutrition & Exercise** ~ Not words we use. The worry is about getting enough food on the table every night. Whatever will happen to our bodies will happen (see first concept).



Work, Education and Other “Systems” Operate Using the Rules of the Middle Class.

To be successful in work and/or school, one must be able to operate within the Print Culture, using the middle class value system.

These rules are “hidden” to those operating in an Oral Culture.

Moving from an Oral Culture of Poverty to a Print Culture often results in “culture shock”

Stages of Culture Shock

Awareness

Initial Euphoria

Irritability

Adjustment

Adaptation

Print Culture is not “better than” Oral Culture. There are positive aspects of both. The goal is not to shed one’s culture ~ rather it is to become multi-cultural so that one can take advantage of many opportunities.



Membership

Membership in a Social Class is determined by an individual's ability to identify with and respond to a complex set of expectations shaped by the values, beliefs and habits of its members.

We all associate with people with whom we identify because everyone has the same social and communication expectations. Breaking through the barriers of social membership is difficult because we are unaware of the unwritten social rules and expectations.

Remember these?

“Working Girl”
“The Breakfast Club”
“Good Will Hunting”
“Trading Places”
“Overboard”



Language ~ It's All About How You Use It!

Formal Register

There is a standard sentence syntax and word choice used in school and work.

Complete sentences and specific word choice are utilized.

Casual Register

This is the language used between friends and it is characterized by a limited word choice (about 400—800 words).

The conversation is dependent upon non-verbal assists.

Sentence syntax is often incomplete.

- The ability to use the Formal Register is a hidden rule of the middle class.
- The majority of minority and poor students do not have access to the formal register at home.
- All state tests given at school are in the Formal Register.
- Formal ~ The pattern is to get to the point.
- Casual ~ The pattern is to go around and around.



Results of Not Knowing/Using the Formal Register?

- The inability to use the Formal Register will knock one out of an interview in two to three minutes.
- Teacher conference, family meetings and interviews with workers all tend to be misunderstood on both side. **Workers want to get right to the point, clients/customers/parents view that as being uncaring and rude.**
- Writing is difficult as the standard organizational pattern has a beginning, middle (plot), and end with the plot being the most important part. In the casual register, characterization is what is most important.

Agency and Organizations also have “hidden rules” and norms.

EVERYTHING is in writing

We keep putting ‘important’ things in writing and clients from an Oral Culture of Poverty keep NOT reading it.



Incorporating Oral Culture Skills Into Your Service

- Focus on building relationships.
- Improve communication through using stories.
- Allow time and flexibility for spontaneity.
- Use repetition. Use repetition. Use repetition.
- Understand the immediacy of poverty.
- Break things into management steps.
- Allow for connecting and relating to emotions.
- Consider Decision Fatigue and how that may be playing a role in action/inaction.

Five Powerful Communication Strategies

1. Use Stories ~ Use vivid examples to allow people to feel the impact of what they are doing.
2. Model appropriate behavior in supportive ways.
3. Develop relationships while sharing information.
4. Use simple, familiar words and examples people can relate to.
5. Give information verbally and repeat it frequently while maintaining attention to the individual.



Resiliency Theory

People rarely state that a PROGRAM was the reason for their resilience to break poverty or crisis barriers. They usually tell stories of a person or people who reached out to them.

Developing Resilience

- Feeling Unique or Special
- Recognizing and Reflecting Strengths
- Helping People See their Opportunities
- Providing Support to Them While They Reach for New Opportunities.

What messages have you received in your life that have contributed to your resilience?

What messages do you provide to the people you serve that leads to their resilience?



Five Elements That Matter

~ From Donna Beegle

- Believe in people's ability to be educated
- Believe in people's strengths and talents
- Know the importance of connecting to others who are educated/employed
- Know that assets are critical to success and know how to build them
- Know how to navigate middle-class systems, procedures and paperwork.





Better Strategies = Better Outcomes

Mentoring ~ Offer opportunities to learn the hidden rules.

Check In Frequently
By Phone or Verbal
Conversation!!!

Include the children
in the plan!
Mentors, literacy,
after-school
programs, etc.

Slow Down and
listen to the story!

Think
Talking ~
Not Typing

Job Matching ~ Would a job with fewer hidden rules lead to greater individual success? Build on strengths like memorization, listening and resource utilization.

Understand that people who are poor may have fears or negative attitudes about school or human service workers.
Work to give them a new frame of reference.

Don't get frustrated by
TMI
Interruptions
Not getting to the point
Hearing the same story over & over
Jumping from one topic to the next



Finally.....

The differences in reality and operation are startling between Oral and Print Cultures.

Adapting YOUR approach to best meet the client/customer's reality is key.

Practice and utilize "oral culture" techniques when appropriate. It will get easier with practice!

Utilize all of your community partners in engaging "oral culture" families. You don't have the time to do it all yourself.

Thank You!

*Yardley Training and Consulting is on Facebook
~ let's keep this conversation going!*

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