Oral and Print
Two Distinct Communication/Learning Styles

Two Distinct Communication/Learning Styles – Oral and Print

The ways in which people give and receive information for living their lives impacts their world view and values, as well as their communication and learning styles. Understanding the preferred communication and learning styles of people in poverty increases our chances to succeed in reaching out to them, establishing relationships, and learning about their strengths, assets, and resiliency characteristics. My personal experiences of growing up in poverty and my research (Beegle, 2000) revealed that people living in poverty develop styles of communicating and learning that are very distinct from those developed by those in the middle class. A better understanding of these differences in communication and learning styles helps professionals to effectively serve people in poverty, and empowers them to ease the impact of the trauma inflicted by living in poverty conditions.

There are two distinct styles of communicating and learning—oral and print—that can be used to frame understanding and provide us with useful language to describe how to improve communication across class barriers. These two communication styles come from their respective cultural and contextual roots:

- **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.

- **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 (Ong, 1982*).

According to Walter J. Ong, all people are born oral culture and learn to be print culture if they grow up around adults who get information for living their lives through reading. Oral culture does not mean that a person can not read; it means that people prefer to seek information for living their lives