

## Sharing What We're Doing

This has been a busy year in the CURA study. CURA partners and community researchers have been conducting all the research methods in preparation for the first CURA conference on December 7, 2006.

The conference offers an opportunity to share research findings and to develop ways of putting the ideas into practice, based on the concept of "cultural empowerment".

### 1. What is cultural empowerment?

The concept of cultural empowerment emerged as a preliminary theoretical framework during the proposal development stage of the Taking Culture Seriously study. While discussing existing theory and practice, it became clear to CURA partners that mental health interventions have been traditionally guided by either power-oriented models or, in an attempt to respond to diversity, culture-oriented models. CURA partners realized that there was a need for mental health services to synthesize these models and the concept of cultural empowerment was born (see chart below).

Cultural empowerment emphasizes knowledge of other cultures (derived from the cultural literacy model), practitioners' awareness of their own cultural identities and the constantly changing cultural identities of others (derived from the experiential-phenomenological model), as well as practitioners' power status (derived from the anti-oppressive model). Such a framework can be useful for promoting a holistic

understanding of mental health as more than the absence of illness, but also as well-being, the interactions between individuals and their social environments, and issues of justice and equality.

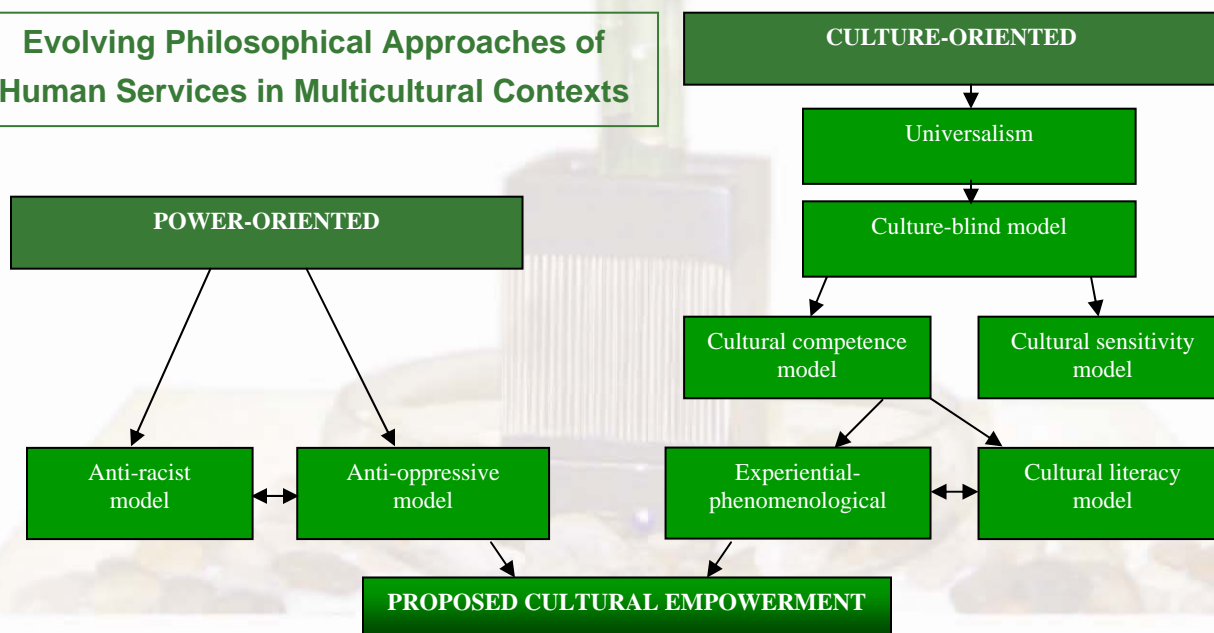
### 2. Building the theory of cultural empowerment

While the preliminary theory appeared promising in terms of developing multiculturally relevant mental health practice in Canada, CURA partners recognized that work was needed to refine and test it. Such a process includes a number of steps: inductively understanding culturally diverse constructions of mental health struggle and wellness; inductively understanding culturally diverse philosophies of mental health supports; collaboratively creating multiculturally relevant service alternatives; and piloting and evaluating these alternatives in community settings.

#### Literature review

The literature review conducted during proposal submission provided background information on culture-oriented and power-oriented models used in mental health and other social services. In the first year of the CURA study, researchers conducted a further review of local, national and international literature which expanded upon and updated information already gathered. Based on this literature review, CURA partner, Dr. Augie Fleras (University of Waterloo, Sociology) developed a background paper on the concept of cul-

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tural empowerment. He later expanded upon the concept to create a draft framework of cultural empowerment that could be used when analyzing data from each of the research methods.

### **Research analysis**

This study comprises a variety of research methods, including the literature review, key informant interviews, a web survey of service providers, focus groups and case studies with cultural-linguistic communities. As the data is gathered, it is analyzed by the sub-committee for that method.

### **Theory building sub-committee**

As the research methods have progressed this year, a new sub-committee was formed to work on further developing the theoretical framework of cultural empowerment. This theory building sub-committee has been meeting regularly to discuss the initial findings from each of the research methods and how to incorporate the content into the draft framework.

Initial discussions focused on understanding what constitutes a framework (the function, components) as well as on how it could be presented at the December conference. The sub-committee then reviewed and discussed in detail a chart that resulted from the cultural empowerment backgrounder comparing and contrasting the underlying principles of power, culture and cultural empowerment models. In further discussions, the chart evolved into the framework to be used by each of the research sub-committees for secondary analysis of their data.

### **Levels of Analysis**

Each of the sub-committees followed a similar process in analyzing the data from their research method.

#### **First level**

- reading and coding the data using a coding system developed inductively by sub-committee members
- drafting a summary report describing the data and the preliminary analysis

#### **Second level**

- more deductive analysis
- sub-committee incorporated the findings from the preliminary analysis into the framework chart
- chart expanded to include information about context, problem analysis, proposed solutions, methods, the transformational process, and proposed outcomes from interventions.



Theory Building sub-committee: Front row (l-r) Joanna Ochocka (Centre for Research and Education in Human Services), Rich Janzen (CREHS), Augie Fleras (University of Waterloo). Back row (l-r) Don Roth (CMHA Grand River), Sarah Maiter (Wilfrid Laurier University), Anne Westhues (WLU). By phone, Nora Jacobson (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health/University of Toronto), Laura Simich (CAMH/U of T)

### **Third level**

- synthesis framework created from the charts from each of the research sub-committees.
- based on the values (the underlying philosophical assumptions), the actions (actors/roles/responsibilities), and the vision (reasons for future changes).

The intent of this third level analysis was to create the framework of cultural empowerment to be presented at the December conference. This framework would form the basis for the development of pilot projects to be implemented and evaluated in the next phases of the CURA study.

#### **3. CURA conference and beyond**

The December 7 conference marks the end of the first phase of the *Taking Culture Seriously* study. It is an opportunity to share the findings from the first two years of research, to introduce and get feedback on the framework of cultural empowerment, and to generate ideas for interventions that fit within the principles of the framework.

In early 2007, we will be verifying the framework with cultural-linguistic communities and service providers in preparation for developing pilot projects.

For more information, visit [www.crehscura.com](http://www.crehscura.com)

### **Conference Presentations 2006**

- Second International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry**, University of Illinois, U.S.A., May 2006
- 3rd Quebec-Ontario Conference in Community Psychology**, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ont., May 2006
- Canadian Council for Refugees International Conference**, York University, Toronto, Ont., June 2006
- Canadian Mental Health Association Toronto Region Lunch and Learn**, Scarborough, Ont., August 2006
- 6<sup>th</sup> European Community Psychology Conference**, Kamien Slaski, Poland, October 2006
- Making Gains Conference**, Toronto, Ont., November 2006

### **Journal Publications 2006**

- "Inspiring knowledge mobilization through a communications policy: The case of a Community University Research Alliance"**. Accepted for publication in *Progress in Community Health Partnerships: Research, Education and Action*, Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Urban Health Institute.
- "Engaging cultural-linguistic communities through a Community University Research Alliance"**. Chapter accepted for publication in *Researching with Communities*, WAIRUA: New Zealand