BECOME
seeding social change

Cultrurally Responsive Practice

A guide to the what, why and how

> Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. …when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say, 'We have done it ourselves.'
>
> -Lao Tzu

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Acknowledgements

"I am because we are...."

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Culturally Responsive Practice

Whitepaper on the what, why, and how

For decades, people and nations have faced the pain of grim and persistent issues, such as poverty, violence, and health disparities. In the face of profound hardship, many communities also show significant resilience. However, the hardship is quite costly financially, physically and emotionally. Counties, states, cities, and related entities like police, schools, and foundations see the generational evolution of these problems and wonder: What is the key to sustainable solutions? How can we outgrow these tenacious and preventable social problems? Research, science, and experience all tell us that two important variables hold answers to these questions: community and culture. A strong sense of community can create a support system around a person or family that protects and buffers them. Culture can guide, bind, and be a source of pride and worth. Attention to these factors are integral to creating solutions.

> "Whatever the problem, Community is the answer."
>
> – Margret Wheatley

Culturally Responsive Practice (CRP) is an effective way for building community and achieving social change. It starts with the premise of community as the solution, and amplifies community through culture and collaboration. It is **a collaborative process of reflection and action that incorporates and responds to a community's unique culture to achieve desired social change, cohesion, and equity.**

CRP is developed out of the process and science of Culturally Responsive Evaluation.[1] As a set of practices, CRP is applicable anywhere. It starts with culture, and can be done by any entity, like police, foundations, schools, policy makers, and community groups. With an end goal of social equity, this process is mainly conducted with communities that have been marginalized and historically oppressed. This whitepaper presents the components, values, and phases of CRP for application with communities.

With a focus on responding to root needs and core strengths in a culturally integrated and sensitive way, CRP is a long-term process for addressing enduring problems., This model has been shown to work in multiple settings through believing in people, the power of relationships and addressing culture.

Elements of other models shown to be effective in addressing community needs are present in the CRP model. Aspects of the model have been shown to increase social capital (e.g., relationships, talents, skills); enhance community engagement; increase physical community assets (e.g., businesses); and make progress on the issue of poverty.[2] With greater social capital comes lower violence and family dissolution.[3] It has also built social cohesion and investment in the classroom with students who have traditionally been disinterested and unattached.[4] Building cultural pride, or feeling a sense of worth related to being part of a group, has been shown to enhance behavior in youth and success in life.[5] Social cohesion also bolsters health and life satisfaction.[6]

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[1] Frazier-Anderson, P., Hood, and Hopson, R. (2011). Preliminary considerations of an African American Culturally Responsive Evaluation System. In Lapan, S.D., Quartaroli, M.T., and Riemer, F.J. (Eds.). *Qualitative Research: An Introduction to Methods and Designs* (pp. 347-372). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[2] Mathie, A. & Peters, B. (2014). Joint (ad)ventures and (in)credible journeys evaluating innovation: Asset-based community development in Ethiopia. *Development in Practice, 24,* 405-419.

[3] Zolotor, A. J. & Runyan, D. K. (2006). Social Capital, Family Violence, and Neglect. Pediatrics, 117, 1124-1131.

[4] O'Hara,J., McNamara, G., Harrison, K. (2014). Culture changes, Irish evaluation and assessment traditions stay the same? In S. Hood, R. Hopson, H. Frierson, and K Obeidat (Eds). *Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evaluation Theory and Practice.* (pp. 205-232). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

[5] Smith, E. P., Atkins, J., & Connell, C. M. (2003). Family, school, and community factors and relationships to racial-ethnic attitudes and academic achievement. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 32,* 159-173.

[6] John F. Kennedy School of Government (2001). *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey Report. Harvard University: Cambridge, MA.* Retrieved on December 29, 2016 from harvard.edu.

Figure 1. The intersection of Culture and Relationships

This potent three-part model includes culture, context, and responsiveness. There are varying definitions for each component. However, below are the definitions that in our experience are most closely relevant to the end goal of social equity and thriving communities.

You have to know what the community cares about. Margret Wheatley, internationally renowned change agent, affirms this as one of the most important lessons to remember in making community change. In large part, culture is what people in a community care about. It encompasses these values, along with their modus operandi. When you know how a person thinks, what they believe in and what they care about, you are better able to collaborate and succeed.

Culture, in short, is about relationships. It is **how people in a group relate to themselves, things** (objects, models, ideas),

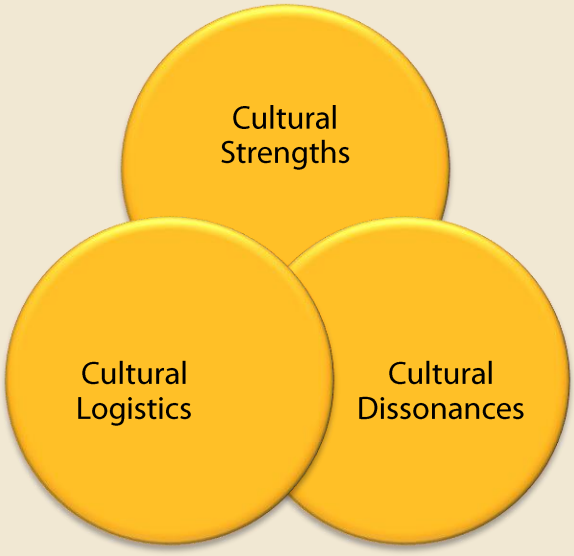

Figure 2. *Tripartite Model of Culture* ©
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and others, as influenced by shared norms, values, language, beliefs, rituals, traditions, and the like (see Figure 1). In this model, it is evident that each aspect holds, shapes and guides relationships and human development.[7]

Culture gives guidance and meaning around how to live in a space or ultimately the world. It is often a result of various adaptations and lessons learned by our ancestors and passed on through modeling and instruction. It can also be created through current context and deliberation. As it is created and adapted, culture possesses inherent strengths, logistics on how to live, as well as dissonance for many groups (see Figure 2).

Cultural Strengths

Each culture has strengths that are binding agents and guides for ultimate success in life. They help a community care for itself and support and increase vitality. These cultural strengths can include the values of a group (e.g. family, hard work), their history and successes (e.g. overcoming obstacles, achievements of group members), as well as ideals and principles (e.g. "love thy neighbor as thyself", "believe and achieve"). These strengths may not be ubiquitous and consistently applied; however, they are present and can be developed. Through the lens of CRP, strengths are seen and used as tools for a community's development, to be manifested more consistently and on a greater scale.

Cultural Logistics

Cultural logistics are the ways we "get things done." They are the manner in which people of a community work, conduct daily business and communicate (verbally and nonverbally). This aspect encompasses language, routines, practices, and the concept of time.

It also includes how people learn and apply knowledge. For example, some learn better in a group setting, while others may learn better individually. Some apply knowledge more effectively when placed in a broader social context, while others may relate to information better with objects or ideas. Furthermore, language can be as simple as English or Spanish; or as complex as dialect, tone, use of words, and body language. If two different cultural groups want to work together, logistics are a necessary base. CRP includes these logistics in planning work with and within communities, particularly: the tools they use, the timeline they're on, the schedules they keep, and the methods of creating change.

Cultural Dissonance

Human nature is inherently complex. It is simultaneously negative and positive, giving and selfish, constructive and destructive. Just as there are strengths to build on, there are behaviors that a group may engage in that are antithetical to their assets and ideals. For example, a culture may consist of the ideal of "love thy neighbor as thyself", while maintaining emotional and social distance from their literal neighbors, or even worse, engaging in destructive conflict. A culture may have the ideal of "every man is created equal", yet treat certain members as subhuman: restricting access and treating them

[7] Rogoff, B. (2003). *The Cultural Nature of Human Development.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.

unfairly. A culture may swear to "serve and protect", however, may also harm. Every culture contains dissonances. CRP recognizes that the context of a group often creates and/or increases these dissonances. For example, if the context lacks resources, like jobs or healthy food, people may search for alternative ways to generate income, which could lead to violence. CRP also learns and attends to the contextual factors that influence these dissonances, such as injustice and oppression. In sum, CRP works with a community within their logistical frame to build on the strengths and minimize the dissonance towards community health and greater social equity.

Ostensibly, attending to context in this process is essential to understanding culture and working with a community. Ignoring context would be akin to trying to understand a fish without learning about the ocean in which the fish lives.

Context is what is around us. It is multi-layered, complex, and sometimes complicated, although the impact on those within can be simple and obvious. CRP recognizes context to be physical, social, institutional, political, societal, and historical. Time, energy, and resources are dedicated to learning context for the community being worked with, and how this context is influencing their culture (see Figure 4).

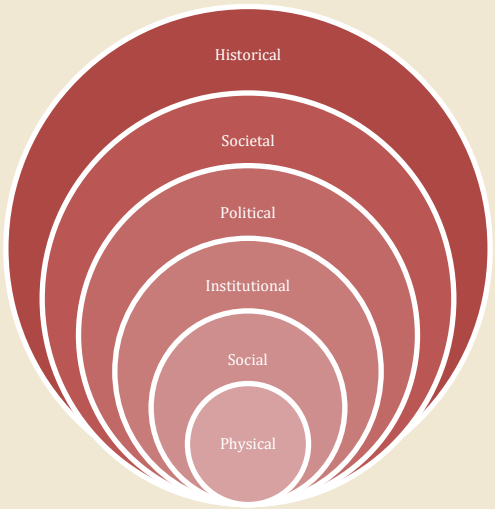

Figure 4. Layers of Context

Physical context of a community includes the made or built environment (e.g. houses, buildings, businesses, sidewalks, streets) and natural environment (e.g. trees, green space). Both can influence behavior in that space. For example, deteriorating houses, clutter, and lack of trees can influence community pride and care. A lack of sidewalks or walkable space can influence the level of outside health activity.

Social context includes the level of social cohesion – how people relate (or do not) to each other, and the strength of the relationships in and around the community. For example: What are the family demographics (e.g. family structure, age) in the community? Are neighbors supporting each other or are they in conflict? Are parents in the school connecting with one another or staying away from the institution altogether? How is the relationship between the police and community members? How involved is the community in civic engagement and attending to their neighborhood? What factors are influencing these relationships and engagement?

Institutional context consists of the existence and the state of affairs of the local institutions, such as faith-based institutions, schools, police department, businesses, clinics, and community centers. These essential resources are necessary scaffolding for the vitality of a community. They also influence culture, be it positive or negative. If strong and culturally responsive themselves, they can be vessels for cultural strengths and progress community development. If they are nonexistent or weak, the community is most likely not receiving the nourishment it needs.

Political context consists of the local, city, state and federal politicians and policies affecting the community. Politicians such as aldermen, senators, representatives, mayors, governors, and the like, as well as the policies they create or perpetuate have a profound impact on communities and residents. This impact may be positive or negative. Politics can open possibilities for resource access, stronger institutions, and more jobs; or they can take them away. Access to these resources shape the behavior, routines, and even communication of many community members. Politics can reduce or intensify cultural dissonance and weaken or support cultural strengths. CR practitioners learn these policies and the agendas and patterns of the politicians influencing their partner community.

Societal context includes the broader social environment of a community, including the media, institutional discrimination,

and how a group is treated and perceived on average. Through the media, a group may be portrayed in a way that fuels or disproportionately highlights dissonance. The media may also influence culture altogether. Institutional discrimination is one of the main barriers for success of marginalized groups. As such, this is a necessary focus for CRP, given the end goal.

Historical context is important, for in it we can see the development of certain patterns and the present community context and conditions. The solution to current problems may also be in the history of that community. History also shows root causes for current conditions (e.g. marginalization leading to current states of violence).

As stated previously, history can also be a cultural strength. There may be pride in a community's story that can be used to bolster esteem, confidence, and the community's motivation and ability to create their ideal environment.

The definition of responsiveness is "to respond quickly and appropriately or sympathetically."[8] Another definition includes "positively." Openness is also a related word. At its etymological root, it means to answer and to pledge. Regardless of the dictionary, responsiveness is constructive.

Through the lens of CRP, responsiveness has two aspects – responsiveness and responsibility. [9] Here, responsiveness includes "awareness, recognition and identification," described later.[4] In this case, responsibility relates to one's duty or principled obligation manifested in action. Together, these two constructs are the thought and action necessary to meet root needs, build on cultural strengths, and create sustainable change.

Due to the bias and decision making pattern already inherent in people and in systems, reflection is necessary to change or form relationships with another community.[10] It includes a mental stance and work needed to form a constructive, open, and inclusive response (answer and pledge) to a community.

This essentially includes self-reflexivity or critical self-reflection (of the individual/self), as well as critical consciousness (of society and the surrounding social world). In CRP, the "self" includes the individual (e.g. the teacher, police officer, program officer, executive director) and the organization (e.g. the school, police department, foundation, agency).

It involves being *aware* of the biases and preconceived notions with which we enter the relationship with a community (e.g. thinking that they cannot make decisions that are best for them, thinking they are indifferent to what is happening in their community). It is also being aware of one's own cultural influences and cultural differences.

It also includes *recognizing* where these biases and preconceived notions are influencing decisions and actions. This self-reflexivity should be before, during, and after a CRP process. It suggests continuously being open to seeing one's associations with a person or group, mistakes made in relationship and decision making, and to the cultural and contextual assets one may have missed along the way. Through this process of reflexivity, the CR practitioner will be more equipped to *identify* actual cultural strengths, logistics, and dissonances as well as develop a substantial and constructive relationship with the community.

From a stance of openness and reflection, the CR practitioner takes responsibility, which is the action component and includes behavior and advocacy.[4] Behavior encompasses the relationship building necessary for change, as well as their (e.g., teacher, police officer, foundation) mutually agreed upon role in implementing the product (e.g. assessment tool); or strategy (e.g. program or policy), that is developed through CRP. Advocacy includes taking actions that help to make policy changes, be it within an organization, municipality, or nation. These actions can be as simple as starting a petition to increase city services on a block. They may also be as complex as working with legislators to develop a bill that enhances education in a district. This advocacy should be grounded in

[8] Merriam Webster Dictionary. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/responsive

[9] Hood, S. & Hall, M. (2007, April 27). *Relevance of Culture in Evaluation Institute* (meeting minutes). Funded by the National Science Foundation.

[10] McBride, D. F. (2015). Cultural reactivity vs cultural responsiveness: Addressing macro issues starting with micro changes in evaluation. In S. Hood, R. Hopson, H. Frierson, and K Obeidat (Eds). *Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evaluation Theory and Practice.* (pp. 179-202). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Values

the culture, informed by the context, and come out of the collective strategy with the partner community.

In summary, CRP is responsive to the cultural strengths and conditions as well as the contextual assets, barriers, and current state of a community. It pulls together the necessary people to address these facets, develop a strategy for change, and implement it, as well as advocate for resources, and further expansion and/or the nullification of structural barriers.

There are inherent values that are infused throughout this process, including:

- Truth – examining what is actually happening and developing a complete understanding, including the good, bad and the ugly.
- Justice – striving for social equity.
- Culture – seeing culture as a reality and an asset to be built upon.
- Reflection – we are often unaware of how our associations and preconceived notions influence our actions and decisions; thus, we must reflect and actively work to see what is actually in front of us.
- Human potential – everyone has wisdom and skill to contribute; they also have potential to grow and flourish.
- Relationships – relationships are essential for growth: strong relationships will provide a solid foundation for this process, the strategy, and the advocacy needed for change.

Phases and Steps

CRP can be applied on various levels. No matter the level or environment, there must be certain factors included. Below is the checklist for developing a CRP process regardless of scale, from a classroom to a judicial system:

- Self-reflection
- Relationship building with the partner community
- Develop together (e.g. curricula)
- Co-create and implement (assessment tools and processes, shared leadership and engagement)

Below are suggested phases and steps for larger-scale entities, such as schools, foundations, police departments, and municipalities. These phases and action steps are designed to transform or enhance institutional processes so that the institution and partner communities can make sustainable change and solve persistent social problems. Figure 3 presents these phases; including unlearning, learning, applying and analyzing, and expanding.

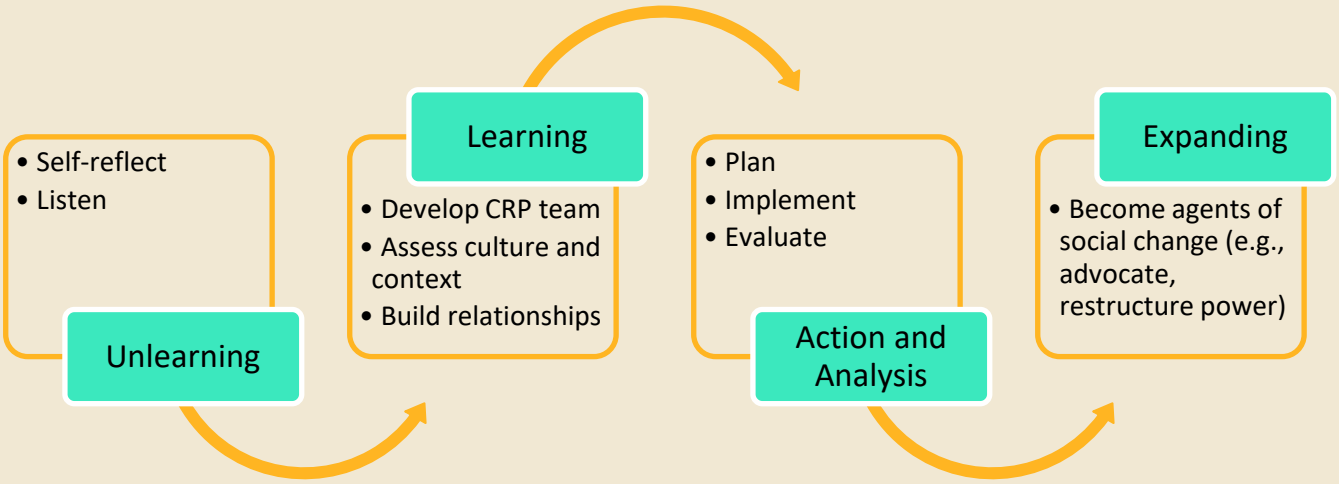

Figure 5. CRP Process

Unlearning

As stated previously, people and institutions have built up associations and preconceived notions about certain communities and strategies. For example, some may believe that marginalized communities are not capable of making decisions for their own betterment. They may believe that top-down approaches are most effective. However, this type of thinking and strategy often lacks sustainable impact and can have subpar or even counterproductive results.

One of the main reasons for this is the lack of community ownership and engagement. If a community does not own and maintain a process or strategy, that process will stop with the funding, or the teacher, or the paid program staff. Thus, rates of violence, poverty or drop-out raise again. Part of learning in CRP is to be self-reflective: critically analyzing our automatic associations, biases, and tacit rules and the impact they have on the work and constituents.

Hazrat Inayat Khan wrote that unlearning is merely the completion of knowledge.[11] In order to unlearn, we must learn more. Another aspect of learning in CRP is through relationship and personal interaction. If we have preconceived notions about a group, direct interaction with them is one of the most potent ways to dispel stereotypes. This can help us establish the bond necessary to move forward in collaboration towards a common goal. Therefore, the following are two action steps in this phase:

1. Self-reflect: The organization (including leadership and staff/faculty) individually and collectively engages in a process of critical self-reflection. They may answer questions, such as

    a. What are our preconceived notions about the community?

    b. What do our past and current strategies say about our beliefs about this community?

    c. What impact have these strategies had?

    d. What was positive? What was negative?

    e. What is our relationship with the community (e.g., conflictual, distant, collaborative)? What evidence do we have to show for this?

2. Listen: Hold listening sessions in and with the community. This is an opportunity for the community to share their stories, experiences, and successes; as well as for the leadership and staff of the organization to express their narrative. This "breaking of the ice" is conducive to deeper learning of who the community is and what they care about. It also helps form relationships with the community, developing the foundation for building a sustainable solution.

Learning

The crux of this phase is learning the nuances and various dynamics of the community and its varied culture. This knowledge will be the basis for a sustainable strategy, relationship building, and engagement moving forward. In order to go through the necessary steps for gathering rich and valid data, a cadre of community members should be included throughout the process. They have insight and direction as to who to engage, how to engage them, how to interpret the information and how to move forward with that information to make change. Therefore, the next two action steps include team development and, then, assessment.

3. Develop a CRP team and multi-disciplinary advisory committee (MAC): This group of people can be two separate groups or combined into one. The MAC should be made up of the various disciplines that are needed to guide and inform the cultural and contextual assessment, including but not limited to:

- ✓ Political Science
- ✓ Public Health
- ✓ Sociology
- ✓ Psychology
- ✓ Program Evaluation

The CRP team should include members from your organization (e.g., school, police department, foundation), community members that represent different community groups and institutions (e.g., elders, youth, parents, pastors, teachers), and members of the MAC.

Through the previous listening sessions, it is important to inquire as to who should be on the CRP team. Once you have convened the group, you should collectively decide on the professional development that community members and organizational stakeholders complete. There are two aspects to this team development: training the CRP team members in

[11] Khan, H. I (1991). *The Mysticism of Sound and Music.* Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

leadership, community organizing and social change efforts; as well as developing the cohesion on the team.

4. Conduct a cultural and contextual assessment: Once the team is solidified, conduct the cultural and contextual assessment, including both primary and secondary data collection.

5. Build relationships: The organization builds strong bonds and equitable working alliances with the community. A relationship is bidirectional. The organization should work to develop substantive relationships with those in the community. For example, have one-on-one meetings with members of the community.

Action and Analysis

This phase includes taking the information learned through assessment as the knowledge foundation for: developing a strategy and action plan for moving forward; implementing that plan; and evaluating its process and impact.

6. Planning: The CRP team analyzes the data from the assessment and develops a strategy for change and a plan for action. This plan for action should be driven by the community.

7. Implementation: The CRP team implements the plan collectively with the community.

8. Evaluation: There should be evaluation happening from the beginning of the planning stage to the end of the project (if an "end" is applicable). This component should include both process and outcomes evaluation.

Expanding

Given the reflection, collaboration and evaluation that will take place in this process, there will be lessons learned that can be shared, as well as processes and strategies from which other entities, communities, and municipalities can learn. There will also likely be contextual and cultural discoveries (e.g., barriers) that may not have been previously known. These may need to be addressed through policy changes. The CRP team has a responsibility to be agents of social change for addressing barriers and building on strengths.

9. Movement: The team should develop and implement a plan around dissemination, advocacy, mobilization and/or organizing, ensuring that the right modes and styles of communication and action are used for the target audiences.

Next Steps

Whether you are a small group, such as a block club or classroom, or a large entity, such as a foundation or police department, variations of this process can be applied to achieving your goal of solving the persistent social problem you and your partner communities face.

Become, Inc. is a 501c3 Center for Community Engagement and Social Change. Our mission is to nourish communities affected by poverty and injustice to make their vision of a thriving community a reality. We work with community groups (e.g., block clubs, community action committees) and institutions (e.g., schools, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, faith-based institutions, police departments, foundations) to solve, effectively and sustainably, institutional, systemic, community, and social problems. With core competencies of program and organizational evaluation, training, coalition building, needs and assets assessment, and community organizing, Become has an established track record of providing evidence-based and culturally responsive professional services and expertise. Our Founder and CEO, Dr. Dominica McBride, has won awards from the American Evaluation Association for her work in Culturally Responsive Evaluation (CRE). She has conducted program development and evaluation projects on two continents, with a diversity of marginalized communities. She has also published on the topic, including the design of a third dimension of CRE. With the help and support of experts in the field of evaluation including Drs. Stafford Hood, Jennifer Greene, and Karen Kirkhart as well as the rest of the team at Become, we built our organization around these principles and action steps.

Contact us today if you are interested in learning more about CRP or implementing this model.

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