



Qualitative Research and Training in Intercultural Areas

QUALTRICA ASSOCIATES

Advanced Practice for Working with Adults from War Affected Areas
A Course Evaluation

Summer-Fall 2008

Immigration is central to Manitoba's growth and prosperity. The Government of Manitoba intends to double the number of immigrants and refugees arriving in the province, over the next decade. One implication of this policy shift is a rise in newcomers from war affected countries, many of whom have experienced emotional and/or physical trauma as a result of living in regions of conflict.

Providing appropriate and responsive settlement services to newcomers is a crucial component of successful integration. A Needs Assessment project conducted in spring 2007 demonstrated that 'helping professionals' ¹ in Manitoba require training to assist newcomers from war affected countries. ² This well-founded need for further training in the delivery of services to newcomers coming from regions of conflict has led to the development of a series of three pilot courses to help professionals and paraprofessionals become better equipped to offer specialized services for this unique population. These pilot courses are sponsored by *Manitoba Labour and Immigration*. ³ This report focuses on the evaluation of the course titled *Advanced Practice for Working with Adults from War Affected Areas*, which was offered in spring 2008.

Between April and June 2008, 10 participants from community organizations, government agencies, and the health and education sectors attended 14 weekly sessions of the *Advanced Practice for Working with Adults from War Affected Areas* course. The topics covered during the course included: an overview of war trauma, different helping approaches (e.g., psychoanalytic/psychodynamic, ecological and social psychological, narrative, cognitive, behavioural, neurobiology and creative movement); relationship building; assessment; intervention; termination of cases; follow-up with clients, vicarious trauma and professional support.

¹ The phrase "helping professionals" is an umbrella term that encompasses social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, settlement counselors and educators, among others.

² Blum, E., Heinonen, T. & Powell, N. (2007) *Needs Assessment: Training for Service Providers Working with Newcomers from War Affected Areas* – A report for Manitoba Labour and Immigration, Winnipeg, MB: Qualtrica Associates.

³ We would like to thank *Manitoba Labour & Immigration* for its support in making this educational experience possible.

The objectives of the course were:

- To increase capacity for the human service sector working with newcomer adults from war affected areas;
- To provide advanced practice knowledge about adult newcomers from war affected countries;
- To support the transfer of knowledge from the course into everyday practice;
- To encourage interdisciplinary networking amongst trained professionals in order to enhance resources to the community and,
- To incorporate program evaluation into the course so that the knowledge gained from the course development and instruction could be used in other venues.

This document outlines the results of the course evaluation. The evaluation was intended to demonstrate if and how these objectives were accomplished.

Evaluation Approach and Methods:

For this course we followed the direction provided by stakeholders involved in the *Foundational* course.⁴ To evaluate the course, we held a focus group interview with 7 course participants, interviewed 2 other course participants, 1 course coordinator, the 2 instructors and the 2 course designers. We also looked at participants' 'reflection paper' assignments, and reviewed other course documentation.

Evaluation Findings:

Course Content and Process

- The theories discussed in the course helped participants to structure their experiential knowledge.
- Participants increased their knowledge in areas such as; the causes of trauma, building relationships with clients and utilizing creative approaches when working with adults affected by war.
- One particular subject that was new to all course participants was the use of creative approaches, such as dance, in the healing process.

“Initially, I was reluctant to take the course because I thought there was no need to take the course...but when I began to learn about how trauma begins, and the different stages and how to handle it step by step...I was really ignorant. I thought I knew but I didn't know.”

Course Participant

⁴ A *Foundational* course for service providers that focused on key foundational concepts for working with people affected by war was delivered in fall and winter, 2007-2008. The evaluation findings from this course are reported elsewhere, and information may be requested by contacting *Qualtrica Associates* at qualtrica@gmail.com

- Since the material that was taught was completely new to almost all participants, the course better reflected a ‘general helping approaches’ model, rather than an ‘advanced’ level model.
- The course helped to deepen some of relationships among participants that were established during the Foundational Course. Sustained connections led to increased understanding and improved access to specific resources for clients.
- Knowledge of identifiable service providers within different agencies led to increased referrals.
- Development of significant relationships among course participants led to *emotional* support for some helping professionals, which is essential when trauma is a focus.
- The course stimulated participants to continue exploring new learning opportunities within this field, including career changes.
- The course fostered validation of unique immigrant experiences among some service providers.⁵
- The course provided an opportunity for participants to promote awareness and potential change within their organizations. Participants developed specific approaches for transferring the information learned into their organizations (e.g., through presentations and sharing of written resources and textbooks with colleagues).
- Among the most important applications of knowledge was the incorporation of a *narrative approach* with war-affected clients.

“Day after day we are polishing our services. For example, if you take a narrative approach – previously when I came across a client I had a form and completed it, but now I let the client talk and tell his story. I try to help him beyond. It’s a very interesting approach; it’s helpful not only for me but for the client; it’s very useful.”

Course Participant

Course Delivery

- The presence of 2 co-instructors ensured continuity and emotional support to participants throughout the course.
- Instructors brought in their own first-hand experience and expertise on course topics (including the use of theoretical approaches).
- The course fostered capacity development for the instructors as well as for the participants.
- Considering the different services offered between professionals in the therapeutic (clinical) field versus other professionals working in the social services and settlement field (i.e., employment counselors), participants thought there was a need for the development of two distinct courses, with different content, in the future.

⁵ Seven out of the ten course participants were first-generation newcomers to Canada.

- Increased consultation between the course coordinator, the instructors and the course designers throughout the course greatly assisted the instructors to decide on the most beneficial content to teach; it also helped strengthen the course facilitation.
- Incorporation of guest speakers' presentations was generally well coordinated with the content of the course.
- Access to literature previous to (or at the beginning of) weekly sessions would have increased interaction around the theoretical approaches to helping newcomers from war affected areas.
- A 'literature review' assignment assisted participants to focus their readings on the topics of the course. However, the knowledge learned through the completion of this assignment could have been more widely shared among course participants.
- According to participants, the use of 'case studies' was one of the best approaches to learn how to work with people from war-affected areas. Case study methodology facilitates the integration of real cases with different theoretical perspectives, and provides valuable input from all helping professionals in the field.
- Consistent with adult education principles, participants expressed that discussions of their personal experiences were a more valuable learning tool for them than academic style lectures and readings.

Overall, the *Advanced Adult Practice* course was meaningful for the service providers attending for both professional and personal reasons. The course offered participants innovative tools that they could apply within their workplaces, and it also acted as a venue where participants were offered professional and emotional support. The following are some key recommendations to further improve the quality of the course.

Key Recommendations:

1. A better understanding of the specific needs of *different* groups of service providers would translate in a more appropriate curriculum. One course could be geared for 'helping professionals' in the general social services and settlement field (e.g. employment counselors), whereas another separate course could be developed for those helping professionals working in therapeutic and/or clinical settings.
2. Whenever possible, the course should include instructors and/or guest speakers with firsthand experience in working with newcomers from war affected areas.
3. Two co-instructors should be incorporated in each weekly session. One instructor can ensure that the course content is adequately and efficiently addressed in every session, while the other instructor must be responsible for the addressing the emotional well-being of course participants. These roles should be alternating, and both instructors should share the responsibility of developing and coordinating the delivery of all sessions.

4. The instructors should be knowledgeable on course topics, while also able to embrace adult education learning principles.
5. Most potential participants face many personal and professional demands that cannot be put aside while investing time in the course. Course participation requires organizational support from employers.
6. Educational opportunities, such as this course, raise awareness of the multi-faceted issues experienced by newcomers from war-affected areas. Participants proposed that the information from this course be provided to students (pre-service) and to professionals (in-service). Continuous capacity-building programs should be supported through educational institutions.

“I think this course should be done in places, in addition to whatever Qualtrica [Associates] is offering so that people have access to it. Because it’s such a valuable course...so many service providers out there don’t have an idea of what is expected from their clients. Or they stereotype about people coming from war affected areas. I think it’s a valuable course...like [to be offered at] community colleges.”

Course Participant

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