Cross-Cultural Communication in Social Work Practice

An Interpretive Descriptive Approach

To Cross-Cultural Communication Difficulties

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ABSTRACT

This research is focused on cross-cultural communication misunderstandings between First Nations people, living on reserve, and outside services/agencies. The goal of the research is to consider issues related to cross-cultural communication. The findings are important for social workers engaged in community practice roles. An interpretive descriptive approach was used to explore the issue. The data were taken from participant interviews and thematic analysis was used to identify themes. Four themes emerged from the interviews: transportation to urban services and technology, cultural practices, language and translation, and jargon and slang. The themes provide insight into how cross-cultural communication misunderstandings and professional practice applications impact relationship building between social workers and their clients.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

Thank you to all the women who shared their experiences, so willingly and with unconditional trust. Your experience and knowledge is valuable and I feel privileged to have been a part of each journey. Each community experience was full of sharing and caring that is true to their traditions. I truly enjoyed the process of sitting and sharing experiences which will impact future community practice.

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DEDICATION

To the Carrier Sekani communities that took part in this research process, thank you. The trust offered will be honored and will assist in building stronger partnerships for the future. I have gained knowledge that I will take with me in my future practice and have created relationships that will last a lifetime. I look forward to working together in the future.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The manner by which individuals communicate is a continuously changing process. Each person's ability to communicate is influenced by the interactions experienced in life. Our lived experiences and exposures to academia, travel, work, and culture influence how we communicate. Communication can use words, gestures, expressions, or a combination of all three. Put simply, communication occurs when one person sends a message and another receives the message. It is often the meaning of the message that is misinterpreted, based on our communication styles.

The focus of this thesis is to examine communication from a cross-cultural perspective. The focus, in this case, is cross-cultural communication differences between northern, remote First Nations community members and outside service providers and professionals. This thesis looks at areas of cross-cultural communication in which misunderstandings can sometimes occur. From this examination, the research presents areas for consideration in social work practice.

There are many factors that contribute to northern social work practice. In remote First Nation communities, relationships and relationship building are important to effective social work. If communication is not occurring successfully, these relationships can be damaged or strained.

As outlined by Collier (1993), relationships and individual connections are paramount in community practice. Community members want to know who you are, who you are connected to, and who your family is. This sense of who you are, outside the "professional" role you represent, is the framework for how successful you may become in your community work.

In my experience as a community mental health therapist and community based social worker, I quickly became aware of the importance of understanding the dynamics of rural remote communities. Understanding community dynamics and becoming competent in cross-cultural communication is the foundation of this study.

Research Question and Objective of Research Study

As outlined above, this research is focused on cross-cultural communication misunderstandings. The research is expanded to examine social work policy and practice considerations. Authors such as Collier (1993), and Delaney and Brownlee (1997), all discuss the issues experienced by social workers first attempting rural remote practice. Some of the issues discussed by the authors include isolation, culture shock, and the general lack of knowledge around cultural community dynamics.

Collier states, "…the social worker in the rural community would have to know how to do a bit of everything or at least know how to make a bit of everything available to the clients in smaller communities" (Collier, 1993, p. 6). He furthers his discussion by stating, "…the rural social worker would have to provide direct counseling or case work services, community development skills,

administrative abilities, and research competence" (Collier, 1993, p. 6). Collier also points out that the social worker will have to develop skills in the area of social policy development, which is discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

Communication is part of the above practical issues. To gain the needed knowledge in community social work practice, communication must be clear. This research focuses on how communication misunderstandings impact professional roles within community practice. The necessary components of successful social work community practice discussed above cannot be achieved without clear and accurate communication. It is significant in the partnership approach discussed in chapter five of this research.

Contributing to the research is my personal practice experience. I have practiced community mental health and social work for the past five years. Through this experience, I have personally observed communication misunderstandings. I have also taken on the role of culture broker, as defined in the concepts section of this chapter, in an attempt to assist in successful communication. Community practice is an experience I have truly enjoyed and hope that this research contributes to successful partnerships in future relationships.

The research question addressed is as follows:

"How do cross-cultural communication misunderstandings occur between aboriginal people living on reserve and outside agencies and professionals?"

From the above question, themes from this research are examined. Building on the identified themes, topics for policy and practice are developed. Both the themes and the policy and practice considerations are then woven together to conclude the findings of this research.

Concepts

The concepts outlined below are defined in the context in which they have been utilized in this research. Because this research is based on communication, specifically cross-cultural communication, it is important that the following concepts are clearly understood.

Rural remote. The term "rural remote" is applied to this research to mean northern reserve communities that are accessible by road, but are far enough outside urban services to have transportation, isolation, and lack of service issues. Rural remote living, in the case of this research, includes a First Nations cultural component.

Collier (1993) discusses rural communities as having smaller populations and a collectivist approach to living. He outlines small single industry communities and as in this research, First Nations communities.

The cultural component within this research is First Nation culture. While not all community members practice traditional beliefs, they all share the First Nation culture. The participants that identified themselves as traditional, indicated their culture as Carrier culture.

Carrier (Takulli)
An Athapascan-speaking tribe of the Subarctic Culture Area,
located on the upper tributaries of the Fraser River in present day
British Columbia. A number of bands hold reserves in their ancestral
homeland. The name Carrier was derived from the custom of widows
carrying the ashes of deceased husbands for three years; the alternate
name Tukulli, used by other Athapascans for the Carrier Indians,
means "people who go upon the water." (Waldman & Braun, 1994, pp.
35)

It is important to acknowledge that while Carrier is the culture identified,

the community members feel strongly about identifying themselves by the name

of their member band, such as, Saikuz, or Nakazdli peoples.

Personal framework. The term "personal framework" is meant to

describe an individual's make-up. Class, race, gender, and ideals, all contribute

to an individual's approach to life. Every individual has unique privileges and

experiences, which impact his or her approach and interactions in life. In this

research, it is important that social work practitioners understand their personal

framework and how it might impact their practice approach.

Another component of personal framework is an individual's values,

beliefs, and religious affiliation. Values and beliefs combine with gender, race,

and class to create a window through which we view the world. An individual's

personal framework can also change over time. Often our framework is provided

to us by our caregivers when we are too young to understand the world. As we

grow, we can add, shift, or even change our framework to fit how we want to be.

All of the above ideals are part of how we communicate and our approach to

interactions in our lives.

Culture broker. The term "culture broker," refers to an individual who has knowledge, in this case, of both First Nations communities and professional services. The culture broker is a bridge between the two cultures and aids in the understanding of issues at hand. For example, a community social worker is often in the role of culture broker. The social worker may attend meetings or appointments with clients to assist the client in understanding the process. The social worker may also assist professionals in needed relationship building within a community and ways or ideas that might be received. Examples of this might include sharing knowledge around how meetings are conducted within community, or words that do not have Carrier translations which creates language interpretation concerns. It might also be beneficial for social workers to share the general approach taken when outside professionals enter a community.

Person's place of knowing. The phrase, "persons place of knowing," is used within the research in a cultural context. The term, used by Hall (1976) in many of his writings, highlights the idea that individuals are largely a reflection of their exposures and roots. It is based in the ideals of constructivism, and suggests that when individuals interact they come from their individual place of knowing. Authors such as Neuman and Blundo (2000) and Fisher (1991) share the constructivist stance, which is discussed in the literature of this thesis.

In this research, this concept is important to communication, because it assists with understanding of how an individual's place of knowing differs and possible miscommunications that result. This is also important to understand

from a social work practice level and is utilized throughout this thesis in practice discussions.

Cultural screening. The term cultural screening is another concept described by Hall. Hall (1976) defines cultural screening as the process of trying to absorb and understand foreign language, which is an overwhelming process. The individual utilizes a defense mechanism, a cultural screen, to protect one's culture and self. This concept is used throughout this thesis to highlight consideration for language translations, cultural competency issues, and social work practice implications.

Understanding cultural screening is important, not only in communication, but also in social work practice. Social workers must allow for this cultural screen and understand its importance. A cultural screen is easily missed, because the concept is silent and internalized. As a community social worker, I have learned the subtleties of the cultural screening process, which is part of cultural competence and successful cross-cultural communication.

In community. The term "in community" as it is applied to this research is defined as the experience from inside the community. It is meant to highlight areas of the research where world views impact communication. The focus is to define the differences between the world view of the community member and the outside professional perspective.

Research organization

This research is divided into five chapters. Each chapter contains specific areas of the research which are outlined in the table of contents. Chapter one

consists of the intention of this research and the research question. The second

chapter discusses supporting literature based on the research question. The

literature reviewed includes the areas of communication, cultural studies,

language, northern remote practice, and research methods. The third chapter

outlines the methodology applied to this research and highlights the qualitative

application utilized. This research is conducted using a descriptive

phenomenological application. Chapter four is the findings chapter, which

consists of themes that emerged through the thematic analysis process. Last,

chapter five brings a conclusion to this research and examines policy and practice

considerations/implications, as well as possible further research ideas.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Human beings draw close to one another by their common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart

Confucian saying

Cross Cultural Communication and Social Work Practice

Communication is the way we express our needs, thoughts, and emotions. This thesis focuses on communication in the form of words, or verbal communication. During the past five years, I have observed misunderstandings related to communication between First Nation peoples and outside social service workers and/or helping agencies. Often, what is heard is very different from what is said, and vice versa. In many cases, this strains already stressful relationships without the intent to do so. This concept in no way dismisses conscious racism and/or oppressive actions that are stated as being, "misunderstandings."

Goldberg (1990, p. xii) describes racism as "... an ahistorical, unchanging social condition, always presupposing claims about biological nature and inherent superiority or ability." Adding to his definition of racism, Goldberg (1990) includes concepts of biological and social racism. Goldberg believes social and/or biological racism occurs when an individual does not belong to the same race, or is seen to have conflicting beliefs from one's peers or social group. Goldberg states, "the social abuse we have come this century to call 'racism'

mirrors in some respects the linguistic and conceptual abuse perpetrated under the banner of race" (Goldberg, 1990, p. xii). This research project focuses on communication misunderstandings that might, in some cases, be interpreted as racism.

Communication and Language Development

The area of communication is a widely written about topic. Authors including Hepworth, Rooney, and Larsen (1997) share similar basic definitions about communication, specifically that, a communicator sends a message to a communicatee who receives and responds to the communicator. Borden (1991) refers to a basic example of communication as being a communicator sending a communiqué to a communicatee. Borden (1991) supports the basic communication definitions and assumes a human communication by definition a standpoint. He discusses day-to-day communication interactions and places them into a systems context. He expands his theory to include self image and interaction concepts of communicating.

Western communication/language is rooted in varying theories. Skoyles asserts that language stemmed from song. In his writing Skoyles states that song, "... can be used to (a) create and display identity; (b) synchronize relationships between singers and their listeners; and (c) provide a 'carrying' structure to enable the transmission of higher levels of information"
(Skoyles, 12/06/2002, http://www.infres.enst.fr/confs/evolang/actes/_actes65.html).

The author continues his theory by linking song to important social connections, whether that is in the context of a pair or larger social grouping. He further references newborns and the connection to song through maternal

vocalizations in the womb. Skoyles concludes his argument by stating that on its own, the argument of song moving to speech, might not be conclusive; however following Darwin and Jespersen's ideas on human evolution, song versus speech, parsimony, evolution, and vocal tract evolution, provide a strong conclusion.

Deacon (1997) suggests that language development stems from an ionic representation, the indexical, and the symbolic. The three areas suggest that language started with drawings, moved towards the connection between 'two', and then towards the relationships between words and objects.

In a web site developed by KryssTal, it is stated that "English is a Germanic language of the Indo-European Family" (KryssTal, 12/06/2002 http://www.krysstal.com/english.html). English is identified as being the second most-used language worldwide. It is further stated the English is the language of choice in the areas of science, diplomacy, aviation, and computing. The web site states that the English language can be traced as far back as the 5th Century A.D., in which the Anglo Saxons and the Jutes migrated and displaced the Celts. As the Celtic speakers migrated, the language was lost and, "Angles were named from Engle, their land of origin. Their language was called Englisc from the word, English derives" (KryssTal, 12/06/2002 http://www.krysstal.com/english.html).

KryssTal (2002) then breaks up English language development into three categories, Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. The Old English is stated as coming from the Runic alphabet, which is Scandinavian based. Middle English is stated as being the dialect of London in the 14th Century and

finally, Modern English, which added verb formation and changing meanings.

KryssTal charts this process as the following:

Figure 1

KryssTal The English Language
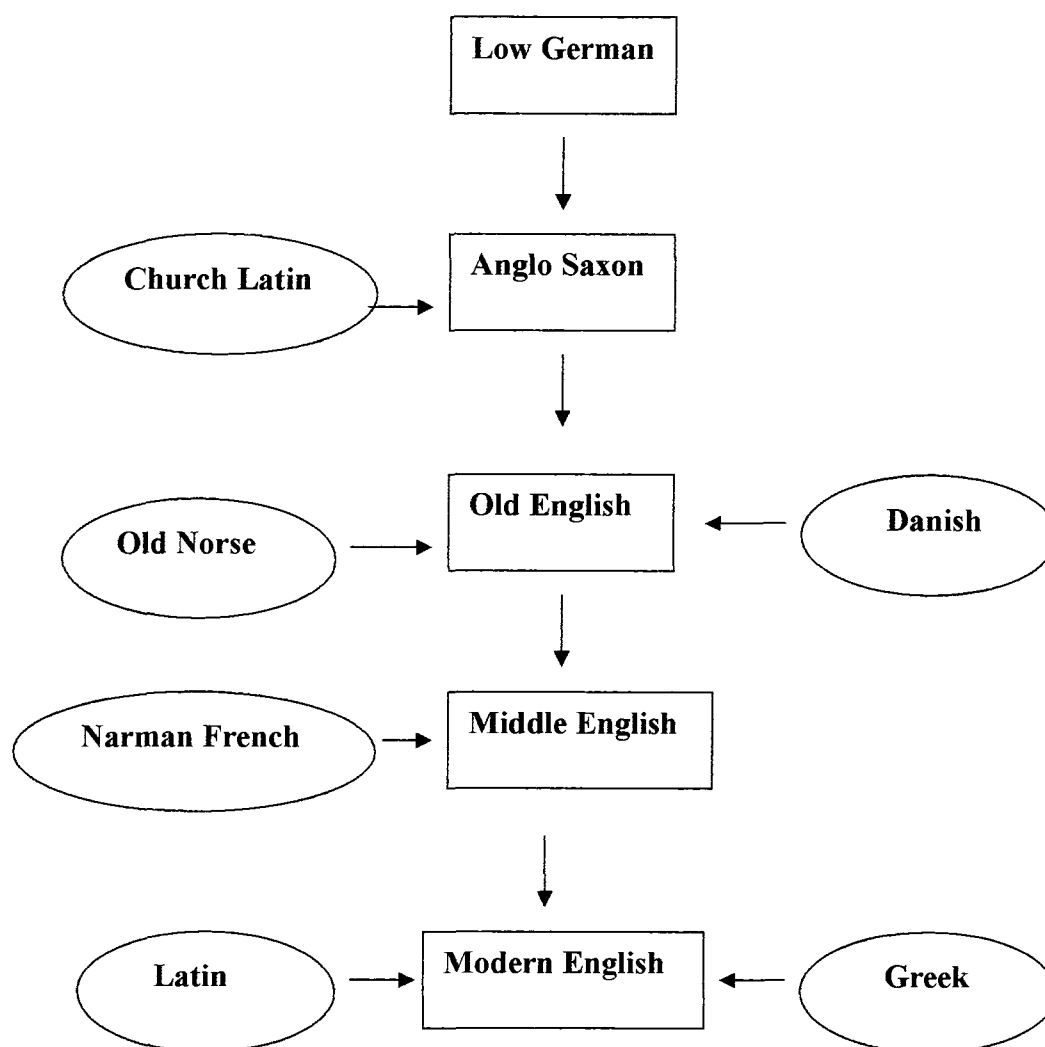
KryssTal (2002) then discusses the complications of a language that continually

evolves by adding new words, but also adopts words from other cultures,

changing their original definition. Borrowed words range from names of

animals, foods, drinks, and many other words of regular common use. The list is too extensive to include in this thesis.

"English is the most frequently taught foreign language in the world's schools" (Bonvillain, 2003, p. 353). Bonvillain notes that the English language is the official language for more then 25 countries and is acknowledged along with others in 35 additional countries. "According to John Platt et al. (cited in Bonvillain, 2003), New Englishes are 'localized' or 'nativized' dialects that have adopted 'language features' of [their] own, such as sounds, intonation patterns, sentence structures, words, expressions,...[and] different rules for using English in communication" (1984:3) (Bonvillain, 2003, p. 353).

Bonvillain (2003), notes that while there are common trends in dominant language, when translating cross-culturally, characteristics are often omitted. Third person subject, or object use, often omits gender distinction. Another common omission is verb usage. John Platt et al. 1984, provides the following examples:

I *graduate* there in 1975 (Papua New Guinea)

I was new here and I *don't know* where to go (Philippines)

(Bonvillain 2003, p. 354).

Bonvillain (2003) reviews more of Platt et al.'s work by recognizing adverbs and "be + verb + ing," are often misused as well. An example of adverb misuse could be, "before I always go to that market." An example of "be + verb + ing," could look like, "Mohan is having two houses." (India) The above cross-

cultural language concepts can clearly impact communication. It would be easy to have miscommunication occurrences based on verb or adverb usages.

Tubbs and Moss state, "The communication process is highly complex; it involves sending communicative stimuli – in this instance, verbal communicative stimuli – from one person's nervous system to another's with the intent of *creating* a meaning that is similar to the one in the mind of the sender" (Tubbs & Moss, 1978, p. 149).

Ellis and Beattie (1986) outline the communication process using three steps. "Any communicative act, whether by animal or human, can be analyzed in terms of:

> 1) A transmitter who encodes information into a signal;
>
> 2) The physical transmission of a signal; and
>
> 3) A receiver who decodes the signal to recover the information encoded by the transmitter" (Ellis & Beattie, 1986, p. 4).

Ellis and Beattie state that miscommunication, or failure in communicating, can also be measured using the above three guidelines. The authors outline five primary systems of communication. They begin with verbal. "The verbal system comprises speech itself. Speech is made up of words, clauses and sentences, which are themselves connected into higher-order units" (Ellis & Beattie, 1986, p. 17).

Next, they examine prosodic. This is defined by the authors as, "prosody comprises intonation, rhythm and those pauses in speech whose position and function are linguistically determined" (Ellis & Beattie, 1986, p. 19). They

expand by explaining the importance of intonation which is the pitch in which words are communicated. Statements like "he died," can be heard as a statement, or as a question, "he died?" depending on the pitch attached to the words.

The third primary concept is paralinguistic. Ellis and Beattie define paralinguistic as, "when we speak we do more than use the verbal and prosodic system of language. We 'um' and 'ah', we laugh and we cry, we whine and yawn" (Ellis & Beattie, 1986, p. 19). They describe these actions as vocal behaviour that is connected to paralanguage. The authors also include the behaviour of silence as important in the concept of paralinguistic and communication.

Kinesic is the fourth concept. Ellis and Beattie define the main channels of kinestics communication as, "movements of the face, head and body, posture and gesture" (Ellis & Beattie, 1986, p. 19).

The final primary concept is standing features of communication. "The principal standing features of interaction are interpersonal distance (and touch), orientation and appearance" (Ellis & Beattie, 1986, p. 19). They define standing features as including appearance, age, gender, and even clothes.

Ellis and Beattie conclude their discussion of the five primary concepts of communication by linking the five concepts together. They have created a distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication styles. They state verbal as words spoken and non-verbal as everything else. "It has been suggested that the verbal channel has primarily a cognitive function – to convey factual information, give orders and instruction etc – whereas the nonverbal

channels have primarily a social function – "to manage the immediate social

relationships – as in animals Argyle 1972." (Ellis & Beattie, 1986, p. 20).

Culture and communication

Gerald Friesen (2000) discusses First Nations people's history in Canada.

He states, "the dominant mode of communication was speech. What is more,

their political commitment, evident in hundreds of episodes of community

solidarity and resistance, has ensured that their knowledge of their group's

distinctiveness – their connection to place – lies at the heart of today's Canada"

(Friesen, 2000, p. 31).

When authors combined the concepts of communication and culture,

different theories and contexts emerged. The authors stated similarities within

their writings by recognizing that cross-cultural communication requires a

different standpoint. Most of the research is from the United States, such as

Brooker (2001) who writes a glossary of cultural studies, in an attempt to

redefine how we characterize subaltern groups, contributing to the ideology of

cultural studies. Reinharz (1992) takes a similar standpoint on culture, but from

a specific vision of feminist methods, which Brooker (1999) would define as a

subaltern group, within cultural studies.

Australian authors Gallois and Callan (1997) speak to the impacts of

culture on communication and how the Western culture has used language as an

oppressive tool, as in the concept of 'business language.' Brislin and Yoshida

(1994) compliment Gallois and Callan's (1997) theory on cultural

communication. They build on the theory by providing cross-cultural

information, and training programs for implementation. A second volume was created by Crushner and Brislin (1997). Once again, Brislin and Yoshida's (1994) book is American based; however, some of their concepts could be adapted to our northern context.

Borden (1991) highlights four areas for consideration in cross-cultural communication. First, the recognition that verbal behaviour is different between most cultures. He refers to subtleties within the same language such as coke, pop, and soda all having the same meaning. Second, nonverbal behaviour will vary between cultures. For example, dress, gestures, or personal space can have different cultural definitions. Third, values in cultures vary. Rules, gender, and status, can all carry different meanings and consequences. Last, Borden (1991) describes mental images, meaning those from the same culture are far more likely to have similar views of reality.

When examining the literature on First Nations culture and language, Antione, Bird, Isaac, Prince, and Sam (1974), the collective authors of *Central Carrier Bilingual Dictionary*, provide exciting insight into the northern context. These authors, most of whom are First Nations, live in the north and discuss their culture, traditions, and First Nations origins of oral language.

Other authors, such as Waldman and Braun (1994), Smith (1999), and O'Meara (1996), although American based, support several discussions of northern remote writers. They agree that the importance of their cultural context or standpoint must be considered in any attempt to communicate cross-culturally.

They also believe there is a need for understanding and inclusion of cultural practices for those practitioners entering First Nations communities.

The above noted authors certainly have a unique standpoint and vision of the north, and authors such as Collier (1993) and Delaney Brownlee and Zapf (1996), support their writings with their own impressions of rural remote practice dynamics. Collier focuses heavily on the theory of generalist practice, which is valuable in terms of environment and communication. Generalist practice consists of maintaining a skill set that comprises knowledge in a variety of areas. In the case of a social work practitioner, generalist practice might include a social worker having a general skill set in the area of addiction, trauma, mental health, and child protection. Collier (1993) furthers his discussion to assist with concepts and dynamics that occur in community practice, which are important in successful communication.

It is also important to recognize the recent Supreme Court decision to allow and respect oral history as valid. Prior to this ruling, oral traditions were considered as "hearsay." The court is now in the position of gaining knowledge in this area and understanding the importance of this history being translated and documented correctly. Interestingly, in Judeo Christian culture, the Bible is being questioned in the context of oral history. The contents of the Bible are currently being examined for validity. This argument made the cover of December's (2002) Maclean's magazine.

It becomes important to recognize that cross-cultural communication contains many layers. The components discussed within this research are

focused on First Nations people living on reserve and outside service agencies.

Friesen suggests "it is people's struggle to master changes in the dominant means

of communication" (Friesen, 1943, p. 7). Friesen discusses the style of

communication utilized in reserve communities, as "oral." For professionals

accessing, or interacting with reserve communities understanding oral dynamics

is crucial. It is also important to combine oral communication with collectivist

theories, cultural world-views, and specific community practices. It is all these

concepts combined that contribute towards successful or unsuccessful

communication.

Hall (1976) suggests that "communication or message is one in which

most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the

person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message"

(Hall, 1976, p. 79). This process of using symbols to encode and decode

messages is how we communicate our needs and/or emotions.

Brooker (1999) focuses his definition of communication on the

transmission of information from one to another. Brooker states, "the technical

model devised for the purpose of efficient telecommunications by C.E. Shannon

and W. Weaver in the late 1940s," was the standard reference for models of

communication methods (Brooker, 1999, p. 37). He expands on this definition

stating, "…this named a sender or information source, message, receiver, and

destination, and saw the main priority of communication as being the unimpeded

transmission of a signal from one point to the other" (Brooker, 1999, p. 37).

Brooker's (1999) discussion points out that the basic definition of communication does not allow for any contextual or extraneous features. Brooker also maintains that the term 'message' does not, by definition, include unintended meanings for forms. He concludes outlining a final weakness within communication as being "...conflation which oversimplifies the differentiated identities and complex NEGOTIATIONS involved in the PRODUCTION and interpretation of even the simplest messages" (Brooker, 1999, p. 38).

Adding to culture and communication, Hall states, "...one of the functions of culture is to provide a highly selective screen between man and the outside world" (Hall, 1976, p. 74). Hall continues by explaining that this process of screening helps to prevent information overload, in which too much information is trying to be understood, often creating frustration. He furthers this concept by stating that the only way to avoid overload is to increase the capacity of information handling. Hall likens this to a thirty-year marriage. At the thirty-year point in a marriage, the communicators are familiar with both spoken and unspoken gestures.

Hall's position on this screening process fits well with Brislin and Yoshida's (1994) theory of collectivism versus individualism. When examining the dynamics of communication from a northern remote community perspective, it is important to consider societal values. Brislin and Yoshida state "...a society that values collectivism will obviously place a higher value on harmony and good interpersonal relationships while an individualistic society is likely to

encourage behaviour that brings merit to specific people" (Brislin & Yoshida, p. 234).

Philips states "…communicative competence, then, refers to the ability of a member of a given culture to use language in a socially appropriate manner (Goodenough, 1976) in the service of social ends and social meanings" (Philips, 1983, p. 3). Philips supports that communicative competence is a component of cultural knowledge.

In my observations, several northern Carrier communities function from a collectivist approach. My observations have been that the elders teach the grandchildren, and the children's parents do their best to care for all the elders. This, ideally, creates a circle of sharing, learning, and respect among community members. This connects well with Philip's theory of cultural knowledge.

My subjective observation of this circle of learning is shared by Crushner and Brislin who state, "…collectivists are relational, and relationships are characterized by long-term duration" (Crushner & Brislin, 1997, p. 46). The authors further support their theory by adding, in addition to duration; collectivist communities also share low mobility in both organization and geography. The authors also connect geography to systemic issues such as divorce, or concepts of immense "social baggage," being more difficult in isolated communities, thus magnifying the effect.

Even within communities where there are several varying clans, you can observe the process of community. An example of this is clearly mapped out in *Nak'azdli t'enne Yakulduk Nak'azdli Edlers Speak* (2001) This book examines

passed down oral stories, family histories and, traditions experienced by the elders interviewed for the book.

Corey and Corey (1997) complement the idea of collectivism in their writings about group dynamics. First Nations communities in many ways function as one unit. If one part of the group is dysfunctional, the rest of the group suffers or reacts.

Communication and Constructivism

A natural addition to the concepts of communication, culture, and collectivism is the theory of constructivism. Constructivism is said to have origins, or roots, in the accepted wisdom of the ancient Greeks. The underlying thought being, "…how can anyone claim to know anything at all?" (Fisher, 1991, p. 6). Giambattista Vico (1668-1744, Italy) is identified by Fisher as being the first constructivist. A historical controversy surrounding the constructivist theory is the debate that defines constructivism as being based on skepticism, and the reality of constructivism having a positive approach. Fisher (1991) states that several individuals, such as Kant, Vaihanger, Paiget, Kelly, Delia, and von Foerster, are participants in the development of the constructivist approach.

Hall (1976) supports the cultural context with his writing on cultural screening. He asserts that the process of trying to absorb and understand foreign language is an overwhelming process, creating a defense mechanism, a cultural screen, to protect one's culture and self.

In addition to Hall (1976), Fisher (1991), Neuman, and Blundo (2000) develop a theory of constructivism. The authors explore the notion of

understanding the "person's place of knowing." To interact with a client or group on any other level will not be successful. They believe a person will always return to a place of knowing that is imprinted on them regardless of whether that place is healthy. Therefore, to create change one must first identify the client's place of knowing and move forward from that point. This connection to communication is significant if the practitioner is attempting to facilitate individual, community, or social shifts.

Cultural Language

Taking the above concept of a language that is extremely complicated in its development, its constant evolution through growth, and the borrowing of words, it becomes easier to understand how difficulties occur.

The English language has even borrowed words from several First Nation groups. From the Cree, the English-adopted "Michigan" translated means big lake, "Quebec" meaning it is shut and "Saskatchewan" meaning rapid current. From the Algonquin, the English language borrowed, "Oregon" meaning beautiful water, and "Wisconsin," meaning grassy place. There are too many to list and many that remain with elders.

When looking at the First Nations history around language and communication, I feel it is important to recognize the impacts of oppression, poverty, and stolen language through the residential school experience. While it would be impossible for me to properly, or contextually document the depth of these impacts, I feel it is important to note when examining the topic of communication difficulties.

In all of the interviews conducted for this research, loss of language due to residential school was discussed. One of the participants stated clearly that at residential school they were not to speak their traditional language and if they were caught doing so they would be disciplined. The participant would hide to speak her language with her fellow school mates, and would practice with her grandparents when she was able to go home. The participant also spoke about the time she went home and her grandparents would no longer speak to her in her language, because they had heard of the consequences being handed out at the school.

While many languages contain roots in oral communication, First Nation peoples take pride in their language origins as being based on oral tradition. When I examine the concepts of oral tradition, I find they compliment the idea of community collectivism that is often present within northern communities. It challenges the individualistic idea of going out and learning by creating a system of story telling that is part of the community and growing experience.

In *Nak'azdli t'enne Yahulduk Nak'azdli Elders Speak* (2001) the book dedicates an entire chapter to oral stories. The stories are descriptions of the historical events or developments of the Nak'azdli community. The contents cover the people's place of knowing about the community before and after contact with 'white' people.

In reflection, the process of this research has grounded the concept of oral language for me. While I understood in general the dynamics of what oral tradition is, I did not make the connection to my participation within that learning

environment. Further, I became more aware through reflection and comparison of what I had read and the debates around the strengths versus weaknesses of oral communication.

Supporting Nak'azdli's book, *Proud Past A History of the Wet'suwet'en of Moricetown, B.C.*, (Cassidy & Cassidy, 1983), both contain components of oral traditions. The books do not address the roots of oral tradition but start from the standpoint of history passed down generationally.

It is important to state that there are several northern reserve communities within which the members identify themselves in relation to the community name or band, such as Nak'azdli, Takla, Wet'suet'en, or Saik'uz, to name a few. A band is defined as "A subdivision or subtribe of an Indian tribe, often consisting of an extended family, i.e., sets of nuclear families living, traveling, and obtaining food together" (Waldman & Braun, 1994, p. 16). In keeping with this concept definition, I have chosen the umbrella of Carrier people as a term of respect and inclusion toward this study of culture and communication difficulties. To comprise an individual community examination goes beyond the scope of this study.

The First Nation people strongly believe in the connection between oral communication and socialization of the group. As a subaltern group which is defined by Brooker (1999) as those outside the dominant population mass, First Nations people have to learn two languages. They must learn two meanings, their world view and the outside world view. As stated in *Dakelh Health Issues Project*, "...though we live in two worlds, our people continue to experience

social, economic and spiritual problems" (Erickson, 1997, p. 3). As

professionals, I believe it is our responsibility to learn the two world views in

order to facilitate ethical practice.

Connecting Brooker's (1999) theory of two languages is the focus behind

this thesis. Communication breakdowns occur when we are unaware of or do not

recognize the differences in communication styles. DuPraw, and Axner, state,

"...culture is often at the root of communication challenges." (DuPraw & Axner,

www.wwcd,org/action/ampu/crosscult.html 11/12/2005). The authors further

their discussion by stating that our culture influences how we approach our lives.

This concept compliments Halls theories on constructivism and a person's place

of knowing.

Social Work and Communication

As professionals working cross-culturally, do we recognize other

cultures' communication styles? I have observed interactions between

community members and outside professional services where upon conclusion

communication has failed. In many cases, participants leave with unclear or

incorrect interpretations of what occurred during the meeting and will inevitably

experience disappointment or confusion.

It is important that practicing social workers become aware of the

communication styles they bring with them into community and the cultural

communication style of the community. Simple jargon, such as "asap" or the

many other workplace professional short cuts we use when communicating, can

create misinterpretations. While these concepts might be automatic to the

professional, cross-culturally they may have no context, thereby creating miscommunication and frustration. It is these frustrations that strain relationships.

Friesen notes the importance of recognizing that "...insight into the relation between the thought of an individual and the action of a group underlines the complexity of the Aboriginal world-view" (1946, p. 49). Friesen, like Hall, highlights the importance of understanding a collectivist approach to community functioning. Both authors support theories of collectivism, or a collectivist approach in community living. Friesen states that oral culture is built on this approach. From a communication and social work practice standpoint, understanding this concept and possible communication implications is important.

When considering communication and social work practice, successful communication is essential. Hick (2005) discusses four principles of Aboriginal social work practice. These principles begin with a focus on recognizing the diversity within Aboriginal culture in the areas of language, traditions, and philosophies. Secondly, maintaining awareness of the history of mistrust and fear of helping professions and social workers. Hick continues his four principles with concepts of colonialism, and Aboriginal empowerment.

Successful social work practice cannot occur when communication is faulty. When working cross-culturally, effective practice begins with relationship building. Workers who fail at communication risk this relationship and in some cases are rejected by the community. Considering Hick's (2005)

principle on mistrust, the window for relationship building is often small and miscommunications can be judged harshly.

Social workers practicing cross-culturally need to understand how these concepts impact communication and successful practice. Once trusting relationships are developed, communication knowledge requires expansion into the areas of language, traditional practices, and beliefs around traditional healing. It is at this point that successful communication provides the opportunity for traditional and mainstream practices to come together.

Throughout this chapter, I have examined concepts of communication and both the Western and First Nations origins in language. To ground my observations of communication difficulties between northern remote First Nations communities and outside agencies, I would like to provide some examples of misunderstandings I have observed or experienced.

The first example reflects the complication of slang attached to the English language.

Example One

I referred a client to a larger community for a psychiatric assessment required for insurance purposes. When the client returned, I received a call to see the client right away. The client was clearly traumatized and upset to the point of vomiting before I had even sat down to see what had happened. After a period of time, the client stated feeling completely victimized by the assessment process. I asked questions to try and determine how things had happened and after 90 minutes was able to understand. Upon the client's arrival, she stated

fears about being in a strange city and telling her story to a stranger. The therapist stated "of course you feel scared." To the client this translated into "you should be scared."

While I was not present, I would like to believe that the therapist was meaning to support the client's feelings of anxiety about being in a strange setting. In the end, my concerns beyond the client were that an assessment had occurred and been documented based on an interaction that at the onset had communication difficulties. In my mind, the assessment became invalid.

Example Two

Another example of outside agency contact is with protection services. I work closely with protection services from the community side and mental health support. In most cases, while relationships between the two can become stressful, they are appreciative of one another's position.

In the area of communication, difficulties occur in word translation, typically in supervision orders. Reflecting on Hall's (1976) writings on cultural screening, I can draw on situations in which I have observed his concept in practice. I have then taken on the culture broker role to ensure that the family understands what was said. I have furthered this role by consistent meetings with outside agency workers to discuss areas of communication difficulties.

Words such as "shall," or "may," are meant to distinguish the difference between discretionary and non-discretionary consequences of events. However, in the cultural translation there is no difference. One community member stated the meanings as, shall we..., or we may..., do the following. As you can see, the

interpretation is very different from the actual intent. These concepts need to be considered in conjunction with the absence of gender distinction, verb, and adverb, concepts discussed previously in this chapter.

The above noted concept is exemplified in child protection orders. Community members are faced with a written document filled with "shall" or "may" statements, meaning we shall or we may remove your child, which for most community members have the same meaning. The consequences are often added conflict for the social worker due to upset parents who assume they are following the rules.

This outside agency language is discussed by Gallois and Callan (1997) as the language of business. The authors discuss the need for consumers or customers to adapt to this "language of business" to participate in that world. They further state that while the business world is making the shift to recognizing the need to speak the customer's language, it is early in its shift. The concept of "business language" is oppressive in practice.

Bonvillain states, "...just as people from different cultural backgrounds misinterpret the stylistic intents and meanings of each others' speech, Tannen cautions her readers that "not seeing style differences for what they are, people draw conclusions about personality or intentions...Understanding the other's ways of talking is a giant leap across the communication gap" (Bonvillain, 2003, p. 197).

To conclude, this chapter has focused on the dynamics of communication with a focus on cross-cultural communication. It highlights language concepts

for consideration in cross-cultural practice. Building on communication, discussions included implications for effective social work practice.

This research is supported by the concepts outlined in this chapter. Communication is a constantly changing and evolving area and cross-cultural communication is one piece of this vast topic. As summarized throughout this chapter, there are several components to communication which if misunderstood can create failed communication. This research aims to look at these communication dynamics with a cross-cultural focus.

The goal is to highlight areas of cross-cultural communication misunderstandings between Aboriginal peoples living on reserve and outside-service providers. Once possible miscommunication dynamics are summarized, this research will offer discussion for future consideration by both service providers and social work practitioners.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Methodology

This chapter will focus on the methodology applied to this

research study and the steps taken in its application. The research methodology

applied to this study is a mixed qualitative approach that is largely interpretative

and descriptive in nature. The approach draws from several methods, such as

thematic analysis, content analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology. This

chapter will begin with a discussion of phenomenology and then outline how the

above noted concepts were applied.

A phenomenological approach supports the interview process which was

employed for this study of cross-cultural communication. Phenomenology

allows the researcher to document from a first-person standpoint.

Phenomenology respects the participants' unique lived experiences and

applies research methods to validate the transcribed experiences. For this study,

the research application chosen is thematic analysis, which is discussed in depth

in the data analysis section of this chapter.

This research highlights areas of "miscommunication" or

"misunderstandings" that may impact the success of professional practices in the

north. This is not to state that practices are not successful; rather, communication

and its interpretation require cultural considerations and learning.

Mason (2001) states, "... qualitative research is perhaps most commonly

associated with certain schools which fall broadly within what is known as the

interpretive sociological tradition, particularly phenomenology, ethno

methodology and symbolic interactionism." This statement describes this

research, which focuses on communication. Mason furthers her discussion by

stating, "Qualitative research aims to produce rounded understandings on the

basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data" (Mason, 1996, p. 4).

Phenomenology

> "Personal experience is often a good starting point for
> phenomenological inquiry. To be aware of the structure of one's own
> experience of a phenomenon may provide the researcher with clues for
> orienting to the phenomenon and thus to all the other stages of
> phenomenological research"

(Manen, http://www.phenomenologyonline.com 3/26/20006). The above quote

articulates why phenomenology is appropriate for this research. This research

process is built on the researcher's working experience and is brought to life by

the participants' stories within the study.

"Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from

the first-person point of view" (Woodruff-Smith,

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/ 3/26/2006). In the case of this

research, the study is derived from the participant interviews. The study also

includes my direct observations of miscommunication dynamics.

Phenomenology grew and came into its own in the early part of the 20th

century with authors such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty

utilizing the theory in their work. As outlined in the above article, "...classic

phenomenologists practiced three distinguishable methods. (1) We describe a

type of experience just as we find it in our own (past) experience. (2) We

interpret a type of experience by relating it to relevant features of context. (3) We

analyze the form of a type of experience" (Woodruff-Smith,

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/ 3/26/2006). Giorgi argues,

"The approach of phenomenology is characterized by the attitude of openness for

whatever is significant for the proper understanding of a phenomenon" (Goirgi,

1971, p. 122).

The writing of phenomemological research becomes particularly difficult

when focusing on cross-cultural communication research. Maintaining accuracy

in the meaning of the experiences of the participants is crucial in the writing

process. Accuracy in the case of this research includes understanding the

language discrepancies when transcribing the interviews. Accuracy also

requires the researcher to gain knowledge in the communication differences that

are culturally based, meaning they stem from a cultural world view. "It behooves

us to remain as attentive as possible to the ways that all of us experience the

world and to the infinite variety of possible human experiences and possible

explanations of those experiences" (Manen,

http://www.phenomenologyonline.com 3/26/2006).

Descriptive research

Neuman states, "...a descriptive study presents a picture of types of

people or of social activities" (Neuman, 1997 p. 20). He goes further to state

that descriptive research focuses mostly around "how" and "who" kinds of

statements. These principles are applied to this research to highlight

considerations in cross-cultural communication. This process encourages the

utilization of a descriptive phenomenological approach to find information and stimulate new explanations.

Royse (1991) describes descriptive research as building on exploratory methods. He furthers his discussion by stating that descriptive research in general aims to survey larger groups in an attempt to appropriately represent the populace being studied. In the case of this research a small group is surveyed. "Descriptive studies can provide precise information on the characteristics of a group of respondents" (Royse, 1991, p. 44).

He compares qualitative and quantitative methods by stating the following:

> Quantitative researchers sometimes employ standardized scales or instruments; they may sample from available respondents or attempt in other ways to provide some confirmation that their findings are reliable
> Qualitative researchers seek to establish reliability in other ways. Sometimes they have those who were being studied read the report in order to ferret out inaccuracies or misrepresentations (Royse, 1991, p. 224).

Royse (1991) furthers his discussions by stating qualitative researchers tend to create good reliability by verifying conversations or interviews, several times if required, to ensure the meaning ascribed to the respondents is correct. Qualitative researchers tend to go back to records publications or officials to confirm data counts.

Giorgi ties the concept of descriptive phenomenology together by stating, "...the guiding theme of phenomenology is to go back to the 'things themselves" (1985, p. 8). Although this research study is interpretive-descriptive in its design, the statement above aligns with the interviews conducted with community

members themselves which are supported by my working experiences. Building on his definition of phenomenology, he states that when individuals are asked to explain a situation, they inevitably provide concrete details (descriptive) of a learned/lived experience.

Method

Most qualitative research includes some demographic data. In this research study, this includes gender, age, and geography. The completed research data consists of four case study interviews completed with aboriginal women between the ages of 30 and 60 years from rural northern British Columbia reserve communities. The interview process is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The geographical area includes Prince George and northwest as far as Prince Rupert.

Rigour of Method

The rigour of this research is guided by concepts of validity and reliability in qualitative research. As outlined by Neuman (2003), validity consists of three parts. First, claims need to consist of plausible data, not statements of absolute truth, but rather intersubjectivity. The concept of intersubjectivity is defined by Neuman as, "…the idea that different people will agree on what they observe in the *empirical* world through careful use of their senses" (2003, p. 537). Second, the support of diverse data that takes smaller pieces and creates research that develops strength through linking the pieces together. Third, the identifying of connections in the details of gathered data.

Kellehear highlights the importance of validity stating, "…validity here begins with the convergence of the researcher and the subject's ideas about the subject's view of the world" (1993, p. 38). Kellehear expands his discussion to include the researcher's ability to take the transcribed interviews back to the participants as an added measure of reliability ensuring the data transcribed is accurate. Kellehear states, "…thematic analysis means that rarely is a 'theoretical framework' or set of hypotheses used. Instead, the researcher is interested in a topic or set of issues and then approaches an interview or document with these issues in mind" (Kellehear, 1993, p. 38).

Kellehear (1993) applies the terms "etic" and "emic," to the thematic analysis framework. Etic, meaning the "outsiders" view of the problems versus the emic, which is the focus of thematic analysis and means staying close to the world view of the insider. Thematic analysis focuses on all parts of the problem as being equal and does not necessarily consider frequency of a theme as a component of validity or reliability.

As discussed above, the reliability of this research has been applied by reviewing the transcribed interviews with the participants to ensure accuracy in the presented experiences. Using the transcribed interviews, a review was facilitated with the participants, which completed the process and added a measure of accuracy and reliability. Following the above noted structure ensures this research contains both qualitative validity and reliability measures.

Giorgi, (1985) shares Neuman's (2003) stance and includes bracketing as a necessary component in descriptive research. The focus in bracketing is to

suspend personal frameworks in order to be present in the gathering of data. This practice also addresses preconceived outcomes and any bias the researcher may hold. Personal frameworks consist of the researcher's perspectives or inherent bias, based on his or her own lived experiences and exposures. Implementing bracketing in the case of this research study required awareness of my position, not only within the communities, but the research itself.

In this case, my personal framework would be developed from being a white middleclass female. I am also a mom, student, and a daughter, raised in a western cultural upbringing. My personal values have evolved based on all of the above privileges and molded or changed as I aged.

As an adult, this framework has shifted through personal growth and conscious choices made around how I want to represent myself as a person. My career choice in social work and the professional framework that comes with this career has also impacted the development of what my personal framework is today. I believe it is important for individuals and, in the case of this research, for social workers to continuously define, in detail, what they believe their personal framework entails. By examining one's framework, you can be clearer in your practice ethics and your standpoint when engaging your clients.

This study follows Neuman's (2000) validity structure by creating the interview process which obtained the data for the research. The same set of questions was presented to the participants and all received the same process guidelines. Following the concept of bracketing, it becomes important for the researcher to suspend personal beliefs in order to create openness to all outcomes

and possibilities. I believe personal beliefs are a component of one's personal framework which is discussed in the previous paragraph. Bracketing may also ensure that the experience of the participants remains pure.

Accurately interpreting the data ensures a solid base from which theme development can emerge. The participant interviews can then be read and re-read to identify consistent words and/or phrases, which is the basis of the research. The transcriptions are then reviewed with the participants to ensure precision. This process is vital because this research is built from the participants' experiences. Specifically, for this research I focused on communication misunderstandings that occur when aboriginal people living on reserve access outside professional agencies.

The themes will be identified based on the research question. The question presented in this research study is:

> "How do cross-cultural communication misunderstandings occur between aboriginal people living on reserve and outside agencies and professionals?"

Once the themes have been accurately identified, the process of linking and applying the themes for practice considerations concludes the research process. Again, the objective of this research is not to judge cross-cultural communication practices but to highlight experiences for consideration.

Data Analysis of Method

To analyze the data gathered from the interviews, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis aims to understand the data by looking for themes

that arise in discussions. "Kellehear states that thematic analysis differs from content analysis because it looks for ideas in the data being examined" (Fook, 1996, p. 28).

Content analysis tends to take a quantifying approach, which is why thematic analysis is a more appropriate application in the research. For example, a content analysis may focus on counting the number of times an item occurs in a document or interview. Content analysis is also designed to manage accurately large quantities of gathered data using a quantified or counting approach.

Kellehear states, "...the most frequent criticism of content analysis is that the fetish for frequency makes the technique atomistic. This means that it breaks data into small, decontextualised and hence meaningless fragments, and then reassembles them using the researcher's own framework (as the outsiders)" (Kellehear, 1993, p. 37).

The final comparison when making the choice of thematic versus content analysis is: thematic analysis maintains an inductive approach while content analysis is deductive in nature. Given that this research is based on lived experiences, inductive analysis is the appropriate application. The remaining information in this methods section will focus on thematic analysis and its application in this research.

Thematic Analysis

Kellehear (1993) describes researchers that employ thematic analysis as "qualitative workers" who tend to use an inductive approach to creating categories that assist in describing a specific culture. Kellehear furthers his

discussion by describing thematic analysis as the technical approach which is

often employed by qualitative workers.

"Thematic analysis derives much of its approach from the sociologists

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. They stress the view that validity is tied to

how well a researcher's understanding of a culture parallels that culture's view of

itself" (Kellehear, 1993, p. 38).

In the case of this research study, the themes were generated from four

interviews conducted by this researcher. Each interview was transcribed for

reading and rereading to note the themes that arise. From this point, the themes

were listed or noted and studied for connections that occur between them. As

themes were identified, they were highlighted in different colours to organize and

create findings for policy and practice considerations. This process of analysis

is guided by the women's stories within the interviews.

The steps to applying thematic analysis are outlined by Jodi Aronson as

follows:

1. First step is to collect the data.
2. Audiotapes should be collected to study the talk of a session or of an ethnographic interview.
3. From the transcribed conversations, patterns of experiences can be listed. This can come from direct quotes or paraphrasing common ideas

(Aronson, http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.html, 3/26/2006).

Building on data collecting is described by Aronson as a "gathering of

patterns." Once the patterns are identified, they can be expounded. Thematic

analysis then continues to create sub-themes that are guided by topics. In the

case of this research, some of the sub-themes might look like similar phrases,

meanings, or feelings that are consistent with all interviewees.

Kellehear, (1993) offers two examples: *Practical principles in thematic analysis*

1. Count – look for repetition, recurring events/experiences/topics.
2. Note themes, patterns – look for underlying similarities between experiences.
3. Check metaphors, analogies or symbols for what is happening.
4. Check to see if single variables/events/experiences are really several.
5. Connect particular events to general ones.
6. Note differences and similarities.
7. Note triggering, connecting or mediating variables.
8. Note if patterns in the data resemble theories/concepts

(Miles & Huberman, 1984, pp. 215-30).

The second suggestion for thematic analysis application is outlined by

Kellehear (1993) as work done by Kern, 1970.

1. Select a period or problem to be investigated.
2. Identify a leading thought or idea *and* its opposite.
3. Trace all ideas to one or another category and develop a 'leftovers' category.
4. Analyze all data to see how well or not they fit the leading idea category and its opposite.
5. Attempt to discern the thought styles of the group or classes which are associated with the manifest idea by going beyond the spirit of the leading idea.
6. Begin process again with the left-over categories

(summarizing Mannheim [1936]).

The final process is the linking of patterns and findings to the literature.

This allows for validity and provides the research with merit. As stated by

Aronson, "A developed story line helps the reader to comprehend the process,

understanding, and motivation of the interviewer" (Aronson, J.,

http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/BackIssues/QR2-1/aronson.html, 3/26/2006).

Reflecting on the above examples, the steps taken for this research are as follows:

1. The research issue to be investigated was identified. (cross-cultural communication).

2. Interviews with community participants were conducted based on the research question.

3. The interviews were transcribed.

4. Patterns of experience and themes were developed from the transcriptions using a colour coding approach.

5. Research considerations and findings were noted for discussion.

The findings area included cross-cultural communication misunderstandings and practice implications for professionals with a focus on social work practitioners. The remainder of this chapter summarizes in more detail the data gathering process of this research.

Participants

Participants were chosen based on having lived experiences in accessing off-reserve professional services. Some of the services are outlined in the interview questions (see Appendix A). The researcher also welcomed women who had employed the role of support person for those requesting assistance in accessing needed services.

The topic/focus of the research was discussed with the community women and from that discussion several were willing to participate. The participants selected varied and all were known to the researcher. I feel the existing relationship between myself and the communities was a positive component of this research. The participants all felt comfortable with me and therefore trusted the process. It was also helpful that I had community practice experience and could discuss issues and concerns from working experience.

The experiences the women shared were based on their need to access professional services. Examples of the services discussed included doctor visits, specialists, Ministry for Children and Family Development, and court services. The women described the dynamics that occurred in their attempt, or a family member's attempt to access urban services. The focus of these interviews is to highlight communication difficulties or misunderstandings which have impacted their experiences. The women discussed areas of communication that they felt create misunderstandings and considerations for change.

I initiated contact with the first participants based on having known the women through past working experiences. My role in rural remote mental health provision has created the opportunity to work with these women and observe the practical components or implications of communication 'misunderstandings' that are the focus of this research study.

As a mental health therapist, working in a community is very different than working an urbanized clinical setting. My role is not only to provide mental health counselling services, but also to provide prevention services, education

workshops, advocacy, community development strategies, and participation in any other issues that may impact the community from a health and wellness perspective.

It also means shifting my personal framework from practicing in Prince George within an office setting and facilitating appointments on the hour to working collaboratively with community members, in remote settings, and many times counseling services can occur in a home setting. It also demands gaining knowledge of the community's context and process of doing things. Culture, while not practiced by every community member, still needs to be understood and is a great part of how the community has evolved, comes together, and functions day to day.

Community work also increases the need for a professional to maintain generalist practice skills. In many cases, there are few or no services within the community itself. In some communities, services are present on varying days of the month or are organized for a specific purpose. Examples of this may include nurses and/or doctor days, which might be one day per week or a few visits per month, depending on the location of the community and availability of the service providers. These providers often change visit to visit, making it difficult for community members to build relationships. Others services may look like a onetime visit to assess and provide information on diabetes.

From a social work perspective, mental health must include skills in all possible presenting areas. In urbanized settings when presented with a client, we have the option of referral. In Prince George, we have services such as the

Sexual Assault Center, John Howard Society for anger management, Elizabeth Fry for women, and many other agencies that focus on specific support services.

In community practice, it is necessary for the social worker or therapist to maintain levels of knowledge in all areas because you may be the only professional able to facilitate the needed services. This is not to imply you must have expert skills in all areas in order to practice community work, but it is essential to have general understanding and practice skills. Then if presented with a specific needed skill, you can gain the knowledge required to facilitate a plan successfully, which is generalist practice. It is from this work experience that this research topic presented itself.

All the women interviewed have lived in their community for more than twenty years. They are full of knowledge and lived experiences that enrich this research study. Two of the participants interviewed maintained their traditional language. The remaining two participants had spent short periods of time living in cities. Their stories are not meant to blame or judge service provisions, rather they are meant to assist with enhancing the success in service provision from a cross-cultural communication perspective. Prior to facilitating each interview, I visited with each participant and reviewed the research objectives. This included provision of the questions to be asked and the signing of all required consent forms. It was at this time that any concern about the research process was addressed with the participants to ensure they were comfortable with the process ahead.

The length of the interviews, while guided by the same set of questions, varied with each participant's experiences. The times ranged from 40 to 60 minutes per interview; transcribing took considerably longer. The process then focused on the reading and re-reading of the transcriptions to begin to create the themes, which will support the concept of this research. All the transcribed data were reviewed with the participants, to ensure accuracy in the intended meaning. This also provided opportunity to review any unclear components of the recorded tapes.

Setting

The individual interviews took place in Northern Reserve communities between Prince George and Prince Rupert, in British Columbia. Each participant was from a different community in an attempt to provide data that is respectful of the differences and unique characteristics of northern communities.

All of the participants' communities are accessible by road. Road conditions are different in each community and weather creates further variability. Travel to the communities requires a reliable vehicle even though, as stated in the interviews, many community members do not have vehicles and hitch hike in and out to access the closest city. Cell phone service is not available in any of the participants' communities, although two of the participants stated having a cell phone for when they are in town, such as Prince George, to call around or back home.

This research aims to highlight cross-cultural communication misunderstandings and how that impacts professional service provision. In my

experience, this includes: community context, culture, resources and as discussed in Hall's (1976) work, "peoples place of knowing." It provides points for individuals to ponder, especially those who may not have had the experience in cross-cultural communication and practice in their career.

This research however does not claim to answer all communication and practice concerns. It is born from this researcher's work experience and supported by the participants in this research study. Because elements such as culture and communication are a constantly evolving process of humanity, this research becomes limited in its purpose.

While there is extensive research available in the area of cross-cultural communication, this research is attempting to localize cross-cultural implications as applied to practices in northern British Columbia between Aboriginal peoples living on reserve and outside service providers. Authors such as Collier (1993) and Sam (2001) provide examples that are focused on northern social work practice and the unique dynamics that occur in practice applications combined with cultural components.

When traveling to each community to conduct the interviews for this research, I was reminded of the steps required for community members to access outside services. Distance, isolation, or concepts, such as Hall's person's place of knowing, become very visually alive as one drives into northern remote community locations. While the analysis is drawn from the interviews, traveling into the participants' communities provided a context that is important to the implications and outcomes of this research. Conducting the individual interviews

within each community also provided a level of respect and comfort to the participants.

Four interviews were completed. Upon completion of these interviews, the concept of theoretical saturation occurred. Saturation in qualitative research occurs when no new information is emerging. Due to the concept of saturation, I stopped with four completed interviews.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were provided with the questions to be asked and the required consents for this research as approved by the ethics committee from the University of Northern British Columbia. This included the knowledge that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed by the researcher or, if required, an agency that would sign and adhere to a confidentiality agreement.

The participants were also informed that the storage of the tapes and transcriptions would be in a locked file cabinet in a confidential, secure office at my residence. Collaboratively, we discussed the changing of names throughout the interview process to protect the confidentiality of the participants. All the above steps were approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Northern British Columbia before any action began with this research study.

Summary

The methodology of a qualitative interpretive descriptive approach, in combination with the principles of thematic analysis, assisted in clearly documenting the components of cross-cultural communication "misunderstandings" that impact service provision in the north. As a practicing

mental health provider working with communities, this process has helped me to articulate personal observations I have been involved with throughout the past five years in remote social work practice settings. This research process has also provided this researcher with the opportunity to contribute to the social work field from a practice implication perspective. This research does not intend to solve cross-cultural communication issues, but to provide examples of lived experiences for consideration.

The next chapter of this study will focus on the experiences shared by the women who participated in this research. This will be facilitated by sharing sections of the completed interviews and the application of thematic analysis to articulate findings. In further chapters, the findings will be built upon for practice considerations.

Chapter 4

Thematic Analysis Findings and Discussions

Analysis of Themes

This research is based on my working experience and is grounded by the interviews conducted with the participants. The themes are extracted from the interviews conducted and suggestions are provided for community social work practice, which are based on my observations and working experiences. The objective is to bring to light cross-cultural communication issues between aboriginal community members and the process of accessing outside professional services. The data collected came with years of experiences and stories that have occurred over time. Each participant offered unique insights that they willingly shared along with ideas about how cross-cultural miscommunication or misunderstanding can sometimes occur.

All of the women who participated in this research came from communities with more than 200 residents. Two of the women speak their mother tongue. These women maintain fluency in the Carrier language and speak Carrier with other community members whenever possible. These women also spent time discussing their fear of their language dying due to the diminishing number of fluent speakers and the lack of the language skills being passed on to the next generation. The participants who contributed to this research spoke from their own experiences and for many others that have shared similar experiences.

As a practicing social worker, I observed this communication misunderstanding dynamic for over five years. My dedication for community work drove this research study. I have seen failure occur in individual planning, meetings and service provision due to cross-cultural communication issues. The objective of this analysis chapter is to highlight areas of cross-cultural communication for consideration.

This chapter will focus on the themes which have been identified through a thematic analysis application. Discussion will follow each theme in an attempt to create suggestions for further research in this topic area. The themes that emerged are as follows:

1. Remoteness and technology.

2. Cultural practices.

3. Language and translations.

4. Jargon and slang.

The above themes will be discussed first as the experience of the participant and then reviewed for the purpose of cross-cultural communication competency considerations. Discussion will then progress to how these themes and dynamics are a part of rural-remote, social work practices.

Remoteness and Technology

Consistent in all interviews conducted were concerns around the lack of transportation and phones and anxiety about technology. As stated in the following sections taken from the interviews, getting to needed services and receiving follow-up information by phone can be problematic. Another concern

is the need to understand technology. Many services are supported completely

on-line, which creates the need for understanding communication from this level.

The interview question focused on what services the participants have accessed

outside of their community and how far?

In my community practice, I have been presented with issues of

transportation that impede community members' ability to access employment,

higher education, and support services. This has created situations in which

individuals for example, have become more ill, felt stuck in terms of

employment, or have felt as if they have no choice but to move so they can meet

their needs.

****

"I travel by vehicle and it's okay in the summer time if you don't
hit any storms but in the winter time it is quite dangerous it's quite
I mean there are icy roads and if you need to get to ah you have an
appointment in Prince you can't go the day ahead you usually go
on the day of your appointment. If you don't have a vehicle
people hitch hike they have been doing that for years."

****

"Close if you have a car, close if you have a reliable car but most
people in our community don't have cars."

****

"It would be easier if I had a vehicle but not having a vehicle
makes it hard, I have to depend on my dad if he is not busy. I
have to make a full day to come and wait until someone is going
back to get a ride home that usually takes all day. My family says
I need to get my license I don't know, something is holding me
back, I know I can drive but don't think I can do good in the
drivers office."

****

The above segments highlight consistent concerns around getting to needed services. From a communication perspective, it becomes more difficult to build needed relationships with outside service providers. All of the participants express concerns around the importance of feeling comfortable with the service providers, which is discussed in more depth in theme two. Transportation barriers make it hard for remote community members to gain the knowledge (professional language) or comfort level when communicating with urban service providers. Barriers, such as transportation, contribute to the reliance on phone services, which makes communication increasingly difficult.

Phone services create issues of understanding language and the quality and speed of information presentation. I have participated in several discussions with community members who needed assistance when getting information over the phone. This method takes away all non-verbal supports and visual cues. The client cannot see the professional for visual assistance in understanding and, conversely, the professional can not see the client to assess if he/she understands the intended information.

All of the participants also pointed out, that when you live in community, most times you just go and see or visit with whom you wish to talk. Calling someone on the phone is impersonal. In urbanized living, most people tend to call first to request a visit or set up a time to get together. Discussions occurred around the importance of visiting from a standpoint of respect.

It is important to recognize that when we have difficulty communicating, people automatically rely on other components in an attempt to gain

understanding. For example, I am always mocked for using my hands, or for having strong expressions. All my life, I have been a hand talker and have found it helpful in cases where I am not sure if what I am trying to say is being understood correctly. Tools such as hand talking or gestures can assist greatly in successful communication but these tools cannot be utilized when communication occurs by phone.

Building on the concept of communication and phones is the ever expanding world of technology. In today's age of technology, even getting your driver's license demands interactions with a computer. Refills of prescriptions are another example of automation that does not allow for clarification when communicating. For example, when calling for a prescription refill the person connects to an automated message system and must follow computer generated prompts. For urbanized individuals, this interaction is common place. In more isolated communities, these practices are not common and can create stress.

As a practicing community social worker, transportation issues can seriously hinder needed services from a case planning perspective. The social worker must build case planning to include meeting the needs of family dynamics and traditional practices. If individuals and their family cannot get to needed services, or cannot get to the family member they are caring for, plans fall apart.

Following Hall's (1976) concepts of "person's place of knowing," when community members spend the majority of their social lives in community, coming into urbanized environments impacts communication. Reversing this

statement when social workers first enter community, they need to adjust to rural communication styles. Social workers will need to adapt their communication skills to include the communications style of the rural community.

The crucial component is the understanding that these differences are based on each person's individual exposure. The practical implications need to be focused on how to communicate effectively when one participant has rural exposure and the other has urban exposure. If these differences are not considered, communication breakdowns are inevitable.

Social workers need to maintain a stronger sense of client-centered planning. It is very easy to implement a plan based on the social worker's exposure which have been developed due to urbanized living. These social contexts may not transfer successfully into community living.

When issues of transportation become difficult, it compounds existing communication barriers. It makes it difficult for community members to communicate face to face and removes communication supports, such as non-verbal cues. Lack of transportation also forces the use of phones and electronic communication which is often not available to all community members.

Transportation concerns also impact the ability for individuals to gain employment, access higher education without moving, and link with various support services. As a social worker, all of these areas impact a family's quality of life from a socioeconomic standpoint.

Transportation also requires a social worker to become very creative when it comes to case plan implementation. Whenever possible, it is important

to create services that are sustainable within the community, such as self-help or talking circles. These services can meet community needs in many areas while also addressing transportation concerns. This does not however, solve any communication misunderstandings that stem from isolation and urbanized technology driven interactions.

Cultural Practices and Communication

The second theme identified from the interviews is cultural practices. Cultural practices play a large role in cross-cultural communication. When it comes to support needs of any kind, it is common for several family members to share the care taking roles. For example, if baby is sick and requires a doctor's visit, mom may be accompanied by grandma, sister, or an auntie, who all share the mothering role of the child. This not only supports the child but also the care givers to ensure everyone is clear about what the needs of the child may be. This example was articulated strongly in all four interviews conducted. The question(s) asked were around what services have you accessed and did you feel understood?

****

"My daughter-in-law came but she sat there she never did any talking, she will not talk because my daughter-in-law feels intimidated by professionals. So any time the grandchildren need to go to the doctor or dentist things like that she makes me either bring them or I have to go with her."

****

"It would be better to bring the family in, if they want to bring gramma and mom and auntie, just bring more chairs into the office. I believe that's just how our aboriginal culture is, in the hospital or when somebody brings in someone cousins, aunties,

and family are going to be there and that's a good thing. I think that's a good thing. Even my daughter who is in her twenties takes me with her to her appointments for support."

****

"I personally I ask a lot of questions if I'm not sure of something, I do I ask questions. I find an answer to anything that any type of services I'm going to receive. I ask how long is the procedure. I ask when might we get the results and how will I get the results and how will I be notified if there is anything you know like there is something wrong maybe with my a test I am taking like I ask all the questions, I just don't go in there do the test and leave. I tend to ask him the questions whereas a lot of our people don't they just go in and do whatever they have to do and then they leave and then they ask us all kinds of questions here at the health center and I will ask why did you ask that question you just asked and they just say I never thought of it I thought of it later and that's the way with a lot of our people."

****

In two of the interviews, the participants who had lived outside of their community briefly, (one 5 years and one 7 years) felt confident in asking questions and participating in accessing professional services when needed. Having lived outside their communities for brief periods of time also gave these two participants the confidence to ask for help, if they themselves required support when accessing services. The participants also noted understanding automated services, and minor computer technology.

All of the participants highlighted a generational component to communication. The women expressed the importance of respecting elders and traditional values held by those community members who were raised traditionally and have chosen to maintain those traditions.

In three of the interviews conducted, references to residential school were put forward as having impacted communication skills. Residential school was discussed as the destroyer of traditional language. Participants stated as students, they were not permitted to speak their traditional language and were punished if caught doing so. The women stated having gathered far out back at the school so they could speak their language with one another. They also stated having a grandparent that made them practice when they had the opportunity to return home for short periods of time, usually during summer break.

Those individuals who maintained the ability to speak their language, continued to teach the language to their children. English became the second language and, for many, by force. Residential school teachers/workers disciplined students who were caught speaking their native language. This discipline instilled a fear of authority that people carried, some into their adult lives. When connecting this concept to communication, fear or resistance to authority creates barriers to what information is being presented.

Residential school played a large role in generations of aboriginal people. While this research is not focused on residential school, I feel it is important to mention this as it influences current communication barriers.

As you can see in the quotes below, ideals, such as listening more than talking, are considered an important part of showing respect. This does not ensure however, that the conversation has been understood as intended, outside a cultural context.

****

"Ya, very quiet, I think in general that's how people were brought up years ago it has to go with our up bringing that our, we were taught that being at my age I could remember being taught that I was always supposed to listen to adults and I was supposed to do more listening than talking."

****

"A lot of people wouldn't go back if they are not treated right like ah I think a lot of the people here ah because Native people never look at people in the eyes straight in the eyes like when non-natives talk to each other like they look each other in the eye and Native people don't tend to do that Native people tend to look on the floor or look else where and that switch is a very like were so used to doing that that we are totally unaware that were we should always make that eye contact and the eye contact makes people feel very uncomfortable because we were raised not to look at people in the eye straight in the eye unless you are angry at somebody yeah then you look at them in the eye but otherwise you even if your generally just conversing you don't I tend to look around look down and I don't not because I don't feel uncomfortable its just the way I was brought up the way I was raised."

****

Another subtlety brought forward by the participants that is part of "listening more then you speak," is nodding. It is considered respectful, according to the women, to nod as a sign of acknowledgement when listening to whoever is speaking. This could easily imply that the individual nodding understands what is being said. This may not be the case at all and without clarification might cause communication misunderstanding.

For example, social work and counseling training consist of theories, such as Rogerian interview methods. Within this theory is "active listening," which encourages the therapist to evaluate non-verbal actions, such as nodding, as understanding. Corey defines this approach as, "…techniques include active

listening and hearing, reflection of feelings, clarification, and "being there," for the client" (Corey, 1996, p. 469). If you are practicing from this approach but the community member is nodding as described above, then what you think is active listening may not be.

This is also important to consider from a social work perspective. If you believe the clients comprehend what you are trying to communicate because they are nodding, the work being done is affected. The nodding gesture does not signify understanding. Further, if the individual does not return due to communication anxieties because he/she does not understand, often this is not considered as a component of a failed plan. Consequences and occasional blaming then occur, all due to unrecognized miscommunication. Service providers may see a client not returning as being disinterested or lacking commitment, without considering communication dynamics.

From a social work perspective, not understanding this concept can impact how successful the social worker will become in building relationships and case planning. As a practitioner, it is important not only to become familiar with these concepts of tradition, but also to act as the "culture broker," assisting clients who require support. In taking this role, the social worker can create further measures to ensure communication is completed in a successful manner. For example, assisting with a supervision order to ensure the parent understands what is being requested, or connecting with medical professionals to assist the client in the doctor's directions.

I have attended meetings with clients on several occasions to assist in creating successful communication. The combination of perceived power, written documents, and interpretation issues can be overwhelming for a grandparent attempting to gain custody of a child. Sometimes the above results in agreement without fully understanding or worse, giving up because of the belief it will not work out. Attending with clients, also allows for the information to be heard by the social worker, providing the opportunity to assist if the client requires clarification and providing education to the professionals in the area of cultural competencies.

It is also important to recognize that not all community members maintain traditional beliefs and practices; however, when focusing on successful communication, clarity and understanding are paramount. Strained and/or miscommunication makes building successful, trusting relationships difficult.

Language Translation

Language and word translations affect successful communication between people from different cultures. For example, there are several English words that do not have direct Carrier translations. This becomes more difficult for those community members who use Carrier as their first language. I have been told by several individuals that they listen and try to translate in their head to understand what is being said. Difficulty occurs when they are trying to communicate something that does not have a direct English translation.

Aboriginal language is set within an oral culture. Written language did not exist until European contact. The Carrier dictionary attempts to show how

this oral language developed written capacities over time. Traditionally, communication in an oral culture was facilitated by story telling and sharing experiences. Taking these oral traditions and attempting to create written history and language where it has never existed before, invites opportunity for cross-cultural miscommunication to occur. The two frameworks are vastly different and important to their individual cultures.

I have observed this process continuously throughout the years in my community practice. Hall (1976) discusses the concept of "cultural screening" which he defines as a filter that exists to let enough information in to translate, but stops when overloaded. If the idea of "cultural screening" overload occurs, all communication, or receiving of information, stops. This concept is discussed in detail within the literature review of this thesis.

A prime example of how misinterpretations or translation errors occur is the absence of third person pronouns. Third person pronouns are words such as, it, its, hers, herself, her, she, his, himself, him, he. An example of how these pronouns might result in communication misunderstanding is found in transposing gender. The topic of translations is clearly supported in the Central Carrier Bilingual Dictionary which states, "No English reader should be disturbed by the apparent disregard of third person or gender (it/he/she) since Central Carrier knows no distinction in this area" (Wilkinson & Walker, 1974, p. xiii).

Another important translation piece addressed within the dictionary is the difference in the alphabet. The Carrier alphabet does not contain the letters f, v,

x, r, p, or q. In discussion with community members, individuals find working around absent letters difficult when attempting translation, especially those who speak fluent Carrier.

Secondary to translations issues are interpretation concerns. If there is no word, what then is the interpretation? In many cases interpretations are being completed on part sentences. For example, if a sentence is spoken and two of the words have no Carrier translation, then it is up to the individual to either guess at the entire intended message or ask for clarification. I have been in many conversations in which the community member has stopped and said, "what is the word for..., or how do you say...?" This opens up serious opportunities for communication misunderstandings that are not recognized, or intended.

The following examples were taken from the interview process. I asked, "How accessible is your community?"

****

Not sure about the word accessible?

****

What do you mean by that I am not sure what you want to know?

****

In both of these cases, the word accessible caused communication difficulties. The word itself was not difficult, but the context in which it was applied created some need for clarity.

Brooker (1999) defines varying meanings for words in his book, *Cultural Theory, a Glossary*. An example relevant to this research is the definition of

culture. Brooker defines culture as, organic cultivation, artistic works, arts (literature, music, sculpting), spiritual or moral values and, as in this research, a group or society. When reading this from the perspective of English as a second language, the concept becomes difficult to understand. This is just one example of a word that has several conceptual definitions.

The English language is full of words that carry several contextual meanings, making English a difficult language to master. From a cross-cultural standpoint, communication misunderstandings become common because words are applied in conversations to imply different meanings.

When examining this idea from a social work practitioner framework, there are several concepts to consider. For example, individual exposures or life experiences impact how one communicates. Throughout their training, social workers gain exposure to academic settings, urbanized work settings, and individual personal experiences. These encounters shift, increase, and add to our communication styles. This is an important consideration when engaging in cross-cultural communication. It is important to think about what the community exposure is when engaging in community social work practice.

Jargon and Slang

The final theme highlighted is the concept of jargon and or slang. Most professionals have and commonly articulate their profession's jargon. Jargon is defined by wordnet in conjunction with slang meaning, "a characteristic language of a particular group, "they don't understand our lingo" (wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn 11/05/06).

Professional jargon combined with the ever-evolving slang connected to the English language can make communication difficult in cases where English is the second language. Below are examples that reflect communication misunderstandings that have been expressed when accessing professional services.

****

"I sometimes have trouble understanding when I go to appointments but don't know what questions to ask, so I ask when I get home, or just forget about it, but then I worry."

****

"One time I went to an appointment and was nervous so I missed what I was supposed to do. I had to go back and brought my sister who helped me understand what I was to do."

****

"Sometimes when they ask questions I am not sure but I answer how I think I should."

****

These examples were taken from clients' visits with various professionals, such as doctors, social workers, pediatricians, and other specialists. The most frequently expressed difficulty from the participants was how many words the English language contains. The participants expressed frustration with having to understand different ways and levels that people speak; for example, the differences between professional jargon and coffee talk with a friend.

Another example is the slang used in everyday conversation. Slang is difficult, because it consists of taking a word such as "sweet," and changing the meaning, in this case to mean "great". The use of slang words also changes with

trends, making it more difficult to keep up with the changes. Slang is often an environmental component to language. Slang seems to shift with culture and setting. All of the above noted concepts exemplify communication outcomes when language skills and levels shift, for example from a daycare, to a lawyer's office, to high school teachers, to social workers, or even social gatherings.

If you expand the above to include environmental dynamics such as a court room, a hospital, a Ministry office, or even a high school parent-teacher-conference, it creates added demands on communication expectations. Some of these interactions also involve written documents, which are discussed in this chapter as possibly problematic. Protection orders are a good example of what can be complicated written communication. These orders often include flexibility in their direction which can be easily misinterpreted. This concept is discussed further in the language translation section of this chapter.

Another example of miscommunication is the concept of double meanings in translation. We have common phrases, such as "you are driving me up the wall," "sweet," "shotgun," or "shut –up!" In these examples "sweet," is referring to excitement about an event, not "sweet," as in a taste. The statement, "shut-up!" is currently commonly used to imply, "I don't believe it." With all of these words being used for varying meanings connected to trends in language styles, it becomes very difficult for individuals who access English as a second language to keep up. It also makes it harder for those who do not have exposure to these changes in language trends.

For example, one afternoon in my first year of community practice I was working at a visibly fast pace. As I walked past the kitchen in the Health Center, the women told me I needed to stop and eat. I respectfully took their advice and joined in the lunch time visiting. Once done, I excused myself, thanking everyone for the lunch and stated, "I had better jet." To me this was representative of the pace I had been working that day, meaning fast like a jet. The women suddenly broke out in great laughter. When all was said and done, I meant I needed to hurry, and they thought I said I had diarrhea! I was certainly glad we sorted out that double meaning.

When it comes to jargon, young people seem to keep up with the changes in dialogue and sometimes are credited with some of the language evolution. Most parents spend time learning the changing trends in their teenager's lives. In more isolated community settings, it becomes difficult to recognize these trends and understand the position of the teenager who is maintaining an identity in two worlds. The young people are often faced with the difficulty of being torn between living in community and what urbanized settings offer. City living offers different opportunities to youth, such as movie theaters, bowling, or shopping.

Summary

This chapter has focused on the findings highlighted through the application of thematic analysis to the participants' interviews. Communication in general is a constantly evolving area. Cross-cultural communication is one unique component included in how we attempt to communicate today. As

highlighted through thematic analysis, the areas covered in this research included transportation-phone service and technology, cultural practices, language and translation, and jargon – slang.

The participants shared their stories of lived experiences, which provided the framework to highlight cross-cultural communication considerations. All of these areas have been covered in this chapter and expanded further to include broader contexts. This chapter outlines how communication misunderstanding can lead to strained relationships.

This chapter also includes dynamics to consider as a social work practitioner considering or practicing community social work. Some of the areas for consideration included case planning, cultural competencies, isolation impacts, and the concept of culture broker to assist clients in successful communication.

The next chapter will discuss policy and practice issues for consideration in the area of cross-cultural communication. It will include implications of miscommunication in the area of social work and community practice.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Conclusion and Practice Implications

Communication is an ever-evolving topic. This thesis centers on cross-cultural communication dynamics that create misunderstandings. The documented misunderstandings are based on communication experiences between Aboriginal people living in community and accessing outside professional services.

This research came to light based on my working experience in community mental health and social work practice. It became clear that cross-cultural communication is a subject that, if improved, could aid in relationship and partnership building with communities. Conversely, if communication misunderstandings are not resolved they may unknowingly strain possible partnerships. Reflecting on my practice experiences and enjoyment of community work, made this research important for my own continued practice experience.

This chapter will focus on tying together the conclusions of this research, which was built from interviews conducted with community women and my personal working observations. This will include practice implications for professionals and social workers working in community settings. To conclude, research limitations and possibilities for future research will be outlined.

Overview of Findings

This research study has focused on cross-cultural communication

misunderstandings. The data came from interviews conducted with community

members from four different northern First Nations reserves. From these

interviews, the methodology of thematic analysis was applied. The four themes

that emerged from the interviews are: transportation to urban services and

technology, cultural practices, language and translations, and jargon and slang.

All of the above-mentioned themes are consistent throughout the

participants' interviews. The themes, while highlighted as individual concepts

for discussion, are clearly connected to community living. The interviews

provide social workers and professionals with cross-cultural community

dynamics to consider in their own practice approach. Finally, after each theme,

links are made to social work community practice concepts to offer awareness in

cross-cultural communication, and areas in which miscommunication may occur.

The following is a summary of the findings in each theme area:

Remoteness and technology

Transportation is found to be closely connected to phone and technology

concerns. All of these services are important in communication and require

exposure as to how they can work to be utilized effectively.

1. lack of transportation impacts access to needed services and
   creates the need to rely on phone services, which can be difficult
   to manage cross-culturally.

2. difficulty getting to services creates barriers in relationship building with service providers.

3. automated phone services are difficult to follow and provide limited or no means to gain clarity.

4. phone services do not provide non-verbal cues and computers require knowledge to operate and are not common in community homes.

5. general differences between isolated community living and urbanized living. For example, high use of computers to pay bills, access information, e-mail, and make reservations.

6. cultural awareness when practicing community social work.

Cultural practice

Cultural practice is a significant piece in how community members communicate. Their cultural framework enters into each attempt to communicate. Understanding this framework is important in cross-cultural communication.

1. family inclusion when accessing outside services is common and important in sharing care taking roles.

2. generational components to communication styles.

3. impacts of residential school in the area of stopping the use of traditional language.

4. impacts of residential school has created fear or defensiveness towards perceived authority figures which can create barriers to hearing messages and asking needed questions.

5. ideals such as listening more than talking.

6. gestures of respect, such as nodding being confused for understanding.

7. cultural competency issues to consider for practicing community social workers or professionals.

Language and translation

Language translation presented unique issues, such as the lack of third person pro-nouns and the differences in alphabets. This is further impacted by cultural components.

1. moving from an oral culture to documenting and creating written culture.

2. misinterpretations when trying to take an oral, generationally-passed-down story or lesson and putting it in writing.

3. lack of the use of third person pronouns.

4. differences in alphabet, Carrier does not contain the letters f, v, x, r, p, or q.

5. words that because of the numbers 4 and 5 do not have direct translations.

6. contexts in which words are used.

7. issues of individual exposures that expand or shift a persons communication style, such as traveling, urban interactions, education, or working experience.

8. implications for social workers when interacting in cross-cultural practice.

Jargon and slang

Jargon and slang have layers of dynamics that impact successful communication. Both jargon and slang build on difficulties that make up the English language.

1. the use of professional terms and jargon.

2. slang that is associated with the English language.

3. the use of words to create double meanings such as "sweet" to mean great.

4. personal exposures that impact individual levels of language skills, such as exposure to college, or university, or more common urbanized interactions.

5. language trends and how fast we change slang or word usage.

6. constant adding of words to the English language.

Policy and practice implications

Policy and practice considerations are important in all research. It is from this that future research, policy, and practice changes can be developed. In the case of this research, the policy and practice considerations will focus on cross-

cultural communication, cultural competencies, and social work practice implications.

Delaney and Brownlee (1995) discuss social policy as having to include issues, world views, and the ways world views influence members of society. They continue their discussion to include dynamics of social arrangement. Some of the considerations within world view and social arrangement include social power, social justice, human rights, nature of society, and societal relationships. Delaney and Brownlee state, "...because they reflect world views, social policies are not always altruistic. In fact, they can promote policies which are incompatible with the values espoused by the social work and other human service professionals" (Delaney & Brownlee, 1995, p. 231).

This quotation can be particularly true in cross-cultural practice. Most guidelines/policies created, as discussed by Delaney and Brownlee (1995) and Collier (1993), are created by individuals in urban settings who have little to no experience in northern social work practice. This includes the unique dynamics of First Nations communities.

Policies and practice methods work together. As policies are created, they are put into practice. These policies and how they are implemented in practice can change and evolve as practices grow. The policy and practice issues taken from this research are:

1. Cross-cultural communication competency considerations for professionals.

2. Cultural competency.

3. Social work practice competency in remote reserve

communities.

4. Policy in cultural competency.

Prior to examining the above-listed policy and practice areas in more

detail, I think it is important to recognize the ethical concerns that surround

policy and practice implementation. Ethics assist professionals, and in the case

of this research, social workers by providing a framework to ensure appropriate

practice is being followed. The ethical considerations for this research are listed

below based on Delaney and Brownlee's (1995) work and are expanded from a

cultural competency standpoint.

Ethical considerations

When looking at the development of policy and practice strategies in

northern social work practice, ethical considerations must be included. Delaney

and Brownlee (1995) have outlined the following points:

1. large geographical area, low population density,

2. a lack of membership and societal resource systems,

3. employment centering around single or dual industries which create

situations where social roles are often forged on the basis of company

roles,

4. government being often run by local power structures, both formally and

informally,

5. a rich mixture of ethnic groups,

6. churches playing a major community role,

7. a smaller scale of living with close family and community ties,

8. a demand for high value consensus, loyalty, and high behaviour

    conformity,

9. additional distinctive features such as:

    i. distance.

    ii. environmental stresses.

    iii. vast uninhabited areas with most of the population living

        in relatively few towns and villages.

    iv. problems of making an adequate livelihood.

    v. overlapping political and administrative jurisdictions.

    vi. limited ability of residents to influence social, economical

        and political policies because of distance and indifference

        by those in power.

    vii. communities consisting of largely transient populations

        (Delaney & Brownlee 1995, p. 46-47).

These concepts are compounded by cultural dynamics. Most of our

northern reserve communities contain the above-listed ethical dynamics as well

as, face language factors, traditional practice considerations, and various cultural

competency dynamics such as traditional governance. These dynamics have

been discussed throughout this research.

When examining the policy and practice considerations, this research will

attempt to include and weave together Delaney and Brownlee's dynamics and

cultural considerations specific to the northern reserve community members who

participated in the research. As spoken to in the methodology chapter, the geographical area involved in this research is Prince George to Prince Rupert.

Identified Four Policy and Practice Issues

Listed early in this chapter were the four policy and practice considerations that emerged from this research process. The four issues are: cross-cultural communication competency issues for professionals, cross-cultural competency, social work practice competency in northern reserve communities, and policies in cultural competency.

All of the emergent policy and practice issues are closely interconnected. Because this research is focused on cross-cultural communication, all four points contain cultural components. Each point also contains some level of cultural competency issues. Last, they are all connected to professional service providers with a specific focus on social workers and their approach to community practice.

Cross-cultural Communication Competency Issues for Professionals

Borden states, "…communication is the sharing of information through meaningful symbols." He furthers this by stating, "…the sharing of attributes bonds components into a functioning system; it creates a relationship" (1991, p. 7).

Non-verbal communication is particularly complicated cross-culturally. Borden discusses non-verbal communication as being based on the belief system or standpoint of the receiver of the message, not necessarily the communicator. If we interpret non-verbal gestures incorrectly, communication has failed.

These concepts require careful consideration in policy and practice development. When developing policy from a cross-cultural perspective, it is important to understand the components of the culture with which you are working. Policy can only be successful in practice if built from the perspective of the group or culture to which the service is being provided.

From a policy standpoint, Borden discusses the framework of bicultural. The idea of bicultural is to allow the values, and beliefs of the culture to direct our behaviour. This encourages competency in the culture, their language, creates successful bicultural interactions, and communication. "Knowing the doables, exigencies, and norms of both cultures is essential to intercultural communication" (Borden, 1991, p. 212).

In conjunction with the above- noted concepts of cultural systems, non-verbal cues, and bicultural issues, policy must include consideration of syntax. Borden states, "...if for example, you encode a message using English rules of grammar and syntax and a direct translation of the English words into a Spanish equivalent, it would be nearly impossible for a monolingual Spanish speaker to understand you" (1991, p. 202). This concept is easily applied to Carrier language translations as discussed in the findings chapter. The Carrier language has differing verb agreements and alphabet letters from English, creating syntax issues.

Pulling together all of the above dynamics, the following are policy and practice considerations to consider:

1. policy development that includes or considers concepts of systems within community.

2. awareness in practice skills development that includes communication concepts, such as, non-verbal interpretations and implications.

3. policy development which considers syntax in translation.

4. policy and practice development that includes differing language requirements, such as discussion of verb and third person issues.

Cross-cultural Competency

Cross-cultural competency and policy, in the case of this research, is specific to the First Nation peoples living on reserves in northern British Columbia. The participants resided in communities within Carrier Sekani territory. Borden reminds us that, "...we know that culture is a systematic concept; i.e., for a culture to exist there must be some bonding agent amongst its components (subsystems)" (Borden, 1991, p. 77). In the case of this research, this concept of bonding is unique to each community and the community's internal dynamics.

Each community has shared and unique traditions. It is important for professionals to acquaint themselves with this knowledge to ensure they can create a framework for successful communication. Cultural competency can be gained by asking questions, observing interactions, and participating within the community.

Culture is defined by Brooker (1999) as, "…a signifying system, 'through which necessarily….a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored.' This thinking has helped inspire a conception of creative work and cultural practice as constituting rather than 'expressing' a given social order and stimulated new directions in the Sociology of Culture and Cultural Studies elsewhere" (Brooker, 1999, p. 58).

Tuhiwai Smith (1999), suggests twenty-five indigenous projects which focus on cultural competency knowledge. The projects support this research by discussing the importance of understanding the value in testimonies, story telling, survival celebration, connecting, and representing. These are only a few of the topics discussed that reinforce the importance of gaining cultural competency.

Delaney, Brownlee, and Zapf, (1996) outline five areas to consider in First Nations cultural planning. First, gaining understanding that First Nation communities are distinct in culture, activity, and physical structure. While several reserves have large populations, the participants, community populations do not consist of more than 2,500 residents. Second, conflict or disagreement can occur during the process of change and it is important to model understanding through information sharing to minimize potential conflict. Third, with any planning, the understanding of culture will impact effectiveness. Fourth, community participation has a role in social planning. Last, flexibility is important. Taking an uncompromising approach will not work; however, recognizing specific needs, as they apply to specific communities, will.

When focusing on the above cultural competency, it is important to incorporate the following in policy and practice development:

1. culture and/or communities' history.

2. how the community defines culture.

3. community structures, such as celebrations.

4. social order within the community context.

5. tradition.

Social Work Competency in Northern Reserve Communities

Building on the above two policy concerns, social work and policy development become important pieces of community practice. Social work professionals need to consider the unique dynamics of the communities they serve. We need to recognize that we come with a set of skills, but we must integrate these skills to enhance the existing system. If social work is to empower and create sustainable supports successfully, cultural considerations outlined in this research become paramount. "Knowing the rules is part of cultural literacy, and affirming the self-concept facilitates the development of independent cybernetics" (Borden, 1991, p. 214).

Delaney and Brownlee, (1995, 1996) refer to successful community social work practice and policy as a "partnership approach." This concept refers to the importance of taking what the community values and their meanings and reflecting this in program building. Partnership is the balance between community support and community respect in the development of policies that are then put into practice within the community itself. Community partnership

can also be utilized by employing non-traditional with traditional methods in program implementation and development.

Partnership must involve the stakeholder, in this case, the community and their cultural dynamics. Delaney and Brownlee highlight four dimensions of partnerships as consultative, contributory, operational, and collaborative.

Education is another consideration for effective community social work practice; especially the development of course training, focusing on community practices and how to adapt mainstream social work policy and practice to include traditional practice. This melding of mainstream and traditional practices creates partnerships and successful community practice.

"Social work education should focus:

> Context, rather than task...Students must learn to understand and analyze the natural systems of interaction which form a community context. They must be taught fluidity; to weave in and through horizontal, interdependent relationships that compose the local community. They need to learn to practice noninterventive strategies"
> (Delaney & Brownlee, 1997, p. 17)

When examining policy and practice from a social worker standpoint the following points should be considered:

1. policy that considers enhancement of existing skills.

2. policy and practice that supports a "partnership" approach.

3. education development for professionals.

4. policy that looks at combining mainstream and traditional approaches to community wellness.

Social Policies in Cultural Competency

Social policy considerations are, in part, a combination of all of the above sections. As stated by Collier (1993) and Delaney, Brownlee, and Zapf (2001) most policy development occurs within an urban perspective. Delaney, Brownlee, and Zapf (2001) also point out that policy and planning in rural settings often occur on an ad hoc basis.

Delaney, Brownlee and Zapf state social work practice must look at the following:

1. Monitoring trends, local responses and needs.

2. Identifying gaps in services.

3. Encouraging the development of needed services.

4. Assist local populations in becoming politically active and having their voice heard regarding human service issues.

5. Lobbying and advocating the south to view the north and rural areas differently

(Delaney, Brownlee & Zapf, 2001, p. 178).

To conclude, these four topics for policy and practice consideration in cross-cultural communication and social work practice are clearly interconnected. To begin or maintain effective work in this area, this research shows the professional must have competent cultural education. This education includes understanding community dynamics, traditional knowledge, history, differing policy needs and, as stated in the focus of this research, cross-cultural communication skill.

Limitations

This research covers cross-cultural communication misunderstanding issues. Throughout this research, issues have been highlighted and discussed from both a communication and social work perspective.

There are two limitations within this research; the first being time limitations. The research will become outdated as culture and language grow. The second involves the small sample size. While the interviews quickly provided saturation, a larger participation number may have created more data for discussion.

Conclusion

This research study has attempted to examine cross-cultural communication misunderstandings between First Nation people living on reserve and outside agencies or professionals. The research outcomes provided four areas that contribute to communication misunderstandings. The areas included transportation to urban services and technology, cultural practices, language and translations, and jargon and slang.

From the highlighted themes, policy considerations were developed. The policy and practice areas discussed are: cross-cultural communication competency issues for professionals, cross-cultural competency, social work practice competency in northern reserve communities, and policies in cultural competency.

The intent behind this research is to provide concepts for professionals and students in the social work field to consider in community practice. The area

of communication and cross-cultural dynamics is growing at a fast rate. To

practice in this area requires knowledge as outlined in this research. In the end,

even with knowledge as outlined in this thesis, the real learning begins once you

enter community practice.

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Appendix A

Consent to Participate

I _____, agree to participate in the outlined research project. I understand that my name will not be revealed. In addition, the name of my community will also be kept confidential. Upon completion of the recorded interview, the data will be analyzed and all tapes destroyed. I understand that the goal of this research is to assist in addressing communication difficulties. I also understand that I may choose to end my participation at any time.

Signed by, _____ (participant)

Phone #, _____

Researcher _____

Date: _____

This research is under the supervision of Glen Schmidt, professor in the Social Work Program at the University of Northern British Columbia. 250-960-6519.

If you have any further questions regarding this research please direct your questions to Max Blouw, Vice President, UNBC, 960-5820.

Appendix B

June 7th, 2004

Permission for Purposed Research Study

Attention: Chief and Council

Chief and Council,

My name is Joanna Pierce, and I am completing my Masters Degree in Social

Work, at the University of Northern British Columbia. My thesis research is

focused on communication breakdown between outside agencies and rural

remote First Nations Communities. My goal it to highlight where

communication breakdown is occurring and possible suggestions for change in

future development of practice procedures.

To obtain this research I would like to conduct interviews in your community

asking a brief set of questions. The questions are attached to this letter. This

research is highly confidential and no identifying information will be included.

The goal is to identify needed changes within outside agencies in the area of

communication. The interviews will support this research and can be submitted

for future considerations.

I will be happy to provide a copy of the finished research to your community. If

you have any further questions I can be reached at 250-960-5770. I generally

appreciate the opportunity to work with you.

Sincerely,

Joanna Pierce, MSW(cand.), RSW

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How long have you lived in the North?

2. How accessible is your community?

3. Have you lived in your community your whole life?

4. How often do you travel outside your area?

5. What support services, i.e. specialists, pediatricians, dentist, etc. are accessible to you and where?

6. What services have you had to leave your community to receive?

7. How far do you travel to access services?

8. What was your experience?

9. Did you feel supported and understood?

10. Did you have any difficulties?

11. Did you require follow-up service?

12. Did the agency follow-up with you?

13. Is there anything that might have been more helpful?

14. Is there anything you might like to be changed for the future?

15. What went well?