INTEGRATING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE METHODS INTO CURRENT COUNSELLING PRACTICE IN CANADA:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FIRST NATIONS COUNSELLING MANUAL

BY

JOANNE BURNS

A Final Project submitted to the
Campus Alberta Applied Psychology: Counselling Initiative
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF COUNSELLING

Alberta
December, 2006
The undersigned certifies that she has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled INTEGRATING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE METHODS INTO CURRENT COUNSELLING PRACTICE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FIRST NATIONS COUNSELLING MANUAL submitted by JOANNE BURNS in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Counselling.
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certifies that she has read and recommends to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a final project entitled INTEGRATING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE METHODS INTO CURRENT COUNSELLING PRACTICE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A FIRST NATIONS COUNSELLING MANUAL submitted by JOANNE BURNS in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Counselling.

[Signature]
(Name of 2nd reader)
Second Reader

[Date]
January 5, 2007
ABSTRACT

Individuals of First Nations descent remain dissatisfied with counselling services despite the profession’s commitment to strive toward culture-infused counselling. A review and critique of the literature addressing counselling services for indigenous people revealed themes for culturally respectful theories including feminism, constructivism, and social learning theory. Culturally sensitive counsellors were described as having an awareness of cultural biases, an understanding and respect for the worldview of their clients, and the ability to integrate wholistic approaches into their practices. This project culminates with a support manual for counsellors and agencies striving to integrate culturally appropriate methods into current practices with the aim of enhancing counselling experiences for First Nations people. Strengths and limitations of the project are discussed along with recommendations for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of this manual was a collaborative effort among several influential people in my life. Dr. Gina Wong-Wylie faithfully reviewed each draft providing input and suggestions for improvement. My husband, Stettler Burns, not only believed in me but encouraged me to see this project to fruition. Perhaps most importantly, the people of the Northwest Territories taught me valuable life lessons leading to the realization of the need for such a project. The information contained in this project was disseminated at that 5th Annual Conference of Researchers and Academics of Colour for Equality Conference in Regina, Saskatchewan thanks to funding by Athabasca University.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................. iv

TABLE OF CONTENTS .................................................................................................................. v

CHAPTER I: Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
- Exploration of the Problem ............................................................................................................ 2
- Rationale ....................................................................................................................................... 4

CHAPTER II: Literature Review .................................................................................................... 7
- Culturally Respectful Theories ....................................................................................................... 8
- Practicalities ................................................................................................................................. 12
- Related Research .......................................................................................................................... 13
- Critical Analysis of Research Results .......................................................................................... 27
- Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 30
- Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 31

CHAPTER III: Procedures ............................................................................................................. 32
- Developing the Manual ................................................................................................................ 33

APPENDIX: Responding to First Nations Voices: Integrating Culturally Appropriate Methods into Current Counselling Practices in Canada ......................................................... 34

CHAPTER IV: Synthesis and Implications ..................................................................................... 35

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................. 38
CHAPTER I

Introduction

Canadian counsellors have become increasingly cognizant of the multitude of diverse cultures within our country. In fact, both counsellors and clients alike exist within a cultural context of divergent race, ethnicity, age, gender, and sexual orientation which influences perceptual worldviews (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Cayleff, 1986; Ibrahim & Arredondo, 1986; Sue, Arredondo, & M‘Davis, 1992). Moreover, cultural identity will not only influence how problems are defined but will also influence the counselling process (Pedersen, 1997). Accordingly, knowledge of diverse cultures and the impact that cultural identity has on the counselling process is now a concern for the majority of counselling psychologists (Casas, Ponterotto, & Gutierrez, 1986). The need to develop culturally appropriate counselling services was articulated by Pettifor (2001) in her statement, “There have been significant calls for professional associations, especially counselling, to include more specific guidelines to address multicultural counselling in their codes of ethics” (p. 26). Culturally appropriate counselling practices are particularly important for clients who identify themselves as belonging to non-dominant cultural groups. In response to these concerns, several codes of ethics in the counselling and psychology fields have now included standards relating to cross-cultural counselling.

The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2000) included standards relating to cross-cultural counselling in all four of their principles. Furthermore, each revision to the CPA’s Code of Ethics reflected a deepening commitment to respect the cultural values of diverse populations (Pettifor, 2001). In the Canadian Counselling Association’s (CCA) Code of Ethics (CCA, 1999), it
was stated that counsellors must strive to understand, respect, and be sensitive to diversity while the Feminist Therapy Institute’s (FTI) *Code of Ethics* guides counsellors not only to address cultural diversities, but also oppression (FTI, 1999). Moreover, on a provincial level, the College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP) developed *Guidelines for Non-discriminatory Practice* among their members due to the increasing diversity of Canadian society and culture (CAP, 2002). In short, the increasing diversity of Canadian culture, along with the inclusion of professional guidelines and codes of ethics addressing the need for sensitivity towards this diversity, highlights the importance of integrating culturally appropriate methods into current counselling practices.

*Exploration of the Problem*

In Canada, approximately three percent of the population is of First Nations descent and in the Northwest Territories this proportion rises to thirty-seven percent (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 2004). These statistics hold particular importance to the author, who grew up in Canada’s North, because the majority of people who accessed her services were of First Nations descent and she is a White woman who experienced a privileged life. First Nations people have experienced historical oppression including colonization, residential schooling, systemic racism, and stereotyping. Due to the impact of historical oppression and the present issues this cultural group faces, Canadian counsellors are likely to be providing their services to First Nations people at some point in their career. Despite the counselling profession’s commitment to strive toward culture-infused counselling, First Nations clients are twice as likely as White clients to drop out of counselling after the first session (LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990).
Several indicators show that First Nations clientele remain dissatisfied with current counselling practices. Results in a study financed by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (1997) indicated that First Nations parents and students wanted more culturally appropriate counselling services for First Nations youth and better counsellor training in the areas of cultural knowledge and awareness, and in using effective counselling skills. According to all respondent groups (First Nations parents, First Nations students, and counsellors providing services to First Nations youth), cultural sensitivity was deemed critical to the counselling relationship. Moreover, Dolan (1995) found that First Nations students in grades 7 to 12 perceived counselling services as inadequate and, consequently, rarely accessed counselling despite viewing it as an essential service. The underutilization of culturally appropriate counselling approaches by counsellors who are providing services for First Nations people may account for this dissatisfaction (McBride Management Ltd., 2001). From the perspective of White counsellors who work with First Nations clients in and around the Calgary area, clients want their counsellors to understand how their personal and cultural histories contribute to their current experiences (Smith & Morrissette, 2001).

An actual example of a typical First Nations encounter with counselling services is illustrated by the following personal experience. There is a recent trend in this author’s community of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories for schools to employ family counsellors to provide the counselling services for students. Although there is a community counselling center, it has a long wait list. However, some First Nations people are able to afford counsellors in private practice through their employee assistance programs. As the previous program manager at an accredited community counselling
center, it was apparent from our agency’s statistics that the majority of our clientele were of First Nations descent. However, as an agency, we neglected to systematically address the issue of integrating culturally appropriate methods into our programs.

Rational

Although there is abundant literature focusing on multicultural counselling, there are considerably less resources available to guide counsellors in the provision of effective counselling services, specifically for First Nations clientele. Of the resources that are readily available, most are either intended for First Nations counsellors or are not comprehensive enough. For example, British Columbia’s Ministry of Education (1997) prepared a support workers’ handbook for aboriginal support workers who are employed in elementary and secondary schools. The purpose of the handbook was to assist support workers in their task of helping First Nations students in achieving success within the school system. The content of the handbook covers information about working with students, parents, colleagues, and communities. Tips for counselling First Nations students based on Peavy’s (1994) research is also provided.

In addition, France and McCormick (1997) described a peer counselling training program for First Nations students at the University of British Columbia. Peer counsellors were taught how to combine traditional cultural methods with counselling approaches. The training consists of three components: (a) helping skills, (b) presenting issues, and (c) networking with community resources. As with the Aboriginal support worker’s handbook, the peer counselling training program is intended for First Nations peer counsellors.
A comprehensive counselling manual available through the Digital Thesis and Project Room at Athabasca University will assist counsellors in assessing cultural biases, understanding the worldview of First Nations clients as individuals and as members of a particular ethnic group, and in gaining awareness of cultural beliefs and traditions. A manual that supports counsellors and agencies in honouring the needs, values, beliefs, and cultural traditions of First Nations people will facilitate the integration of culturally appropriate methods and policies into current professional counselling practices. First Nations people are a diverse group with different traditions and these differences need to be honoured. Despite divergent customs, First Nations people tend to share common core beliefs and values (France & McCormick, 1997; Herring, 1998; McCormick & France, 1995; Peavy & Li, 2003; Thomason, 1991) such as a wholistic perspective and living in harmony with nature. A culture-centered approach to counselling will expand the repertoire of appropriate intervention techniques available to counsellors, thereby enhancing the counselling experience for First Nations people. If counsellors want to encourage First Nations people to access their services and remain engaged in the therapeutic process, then it is vital to incorporate methods that First Nations people will respond to in a positive manner in order to enhance the counselling relationship (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; Pinderhughes, 1989). The development of a manual to support counsellors in this endeavor is a response to the needs and voices of First Nations people.

In this final project document, the author will describe the conceptual foundations for integrating culturally appropriate methods into current counselling practice by summarizing theoretical approaches to culturally appropriate counselling services for First Nations people. Following the literature review, a comprehensive critical analysis of
the literature which addresses integrating culturally appropriate methods into current
counselling practices for First Nations clientele will be presented. The actual steps
required in developing the First Nations counselling manual will be explained before the
manual is presented. Following the presentation of the First Nations counselling manual,
a synthesis of the work and the implications of the manual will be explored. For the
purposes and scope of this project, individuals of First Nations descent are defined as
indigenous individuals of North America and their descendents excluding the Inuit and
Métis. For the sake of brevity, the term “First Nations people” will be used when referring
to individuals of First Nations descent.
CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Counsellors need to be sensitive to the cultural context of the people who are accessing their services (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998; Pettifor, 1998) and respect the belief systems of their clients in order to maximize the benefit of counselling services for diverse clients. In other words, the counselling approach and techniques must fit within the value and belief systems of the client (France & McCormick, 1997; McCormick & France, 1995; Pinderhughes, 1989). Cultural misunderstandings can negatively impact on the therapeutic alliance between counsellor and client by creating mistrust and a perception of being devalued. In order for counselling to be effective, the counsellor must first understand how the client views the world. Recognizing and acknowledging cultural differences, bracketing assumptions, learning about cultural beliefs and practices, and accessing consultation and community resources are key components in successful counselling sessions (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001).

Based on a review of the relevant literature, theories deemed to be culturally respectful in guiding the counselling process with First Nations people will first be explored. The discussion will then turn to practical suggestions on how to structure counselling sessions in ways that will facilitate client engagement. Next, related research will be described for the reader with a focus on emergent themes. A critical analysis of the research will be provided including a discussion of strengths and limitations of the studies.
Culturally Respectful Theories

First Nations people are a diverse population whose beliefs, values, and worldviews vary due to differences in contextual factors such as: acculturation, nation or band affiliation, geographical upbringing, age, and socio-economic status (Garrett & Herring, 2001). Because of this diversity, it is improbable that one specific theory or approach will be culturally respectful for all Native clients. However, a review of the relevant literature addressing appropriate counselling techniques for Native people revealed some emergent themes for culturally respectful theories.

Feminist Perspectives

The theoretical underpinnings for this project are grounded within feminist perspectives. Inherent power imbalances exist within all counselling contexts wherein one person is seeking assistance in overcoming difficulties from another person who is perceived as an expert in the helping process. Moreover, the interaction usually occurs within the counsellor’s familiar environment. The First Nations counselling context may contain additional power imbalances if the counsellor enjoys a position of privilege through identification with the dominant culture (Cayleff, 1986; FTI, 1999). The dominant cultural perspective discriminates against people who have different worldviews (Pettifor, 2001). Arthur and Collins (2005) stressed the importance of considering culture in order to understand the experience of all people and argued that this belief is not reflected in current counselling practices. Clients should not be expected to accommodate or adjust to dominant perspectives and practices. According to Poonwassie and Charter (2001), understanding the worldviews of non-dominant
populations “is an important step towards de-colonization and facilitation of empowerment” (p. 64).

Although there are considerable differences between individuals within any given population, the majority of First Nations people value social interconnectedness and social responsibility (Herring, 1998). A common belief stemming from these values is that one person’s problem is the community’s problem (Lafromboise et al., 1990). Thus, individuals with a First Nations cultural identity are more likely to want to include others in their healing journey (France & McCormick, 1997; McCormick & France, 1995; Thomason, 1991). This implies that a feminist theoretical orientation would be appropriate in guiding a project aimed at enhancing services for First Nations people because the feminist perspective emphasizes the impact of social and cultural contexts in the development of presenting problems. In fact, several authors have suggested that because many First Nations people have experienced oppression, a counselling orientation based on empowerment and emancipatory themes will assist First Nations clients in overcoming both internalized and externalized forms of oppression (Lafromboise et al., 1990; Peavy & Li, 2003).

**Constructivism**

Peavy (2000) and Peavy and Li (2003) suggested a constructivist approach to intercultural counselling because of the emphasis on respect for diversity, helping based on cultural hypotheses, and collaboration. Similar to counsellors who embrace feminist theory, constructivist counsellors view individuals within their sociocultural context and use a tentative approach when facilitating the change process. One of the primary goals for a constructivist counsellor is to increase the client’s capacity to participate in social
life (Peavy, 2000). As previously mentioned, indigenous culture embodies the values of social interconnectedness and social responsibility (Herring, 1998). According to Herring (1998) and Restoule (1997), many traditional First Nations people believe that there should be no interference in an individual’s decision making process and balk at giving or receiving advice or direct instruction. The spirit of the constructivist approach minimizes the inherent power imbalances within the client – counsellor relationship and is compatible with traditional beliefs and values of First Nations people.

Social Learning Theory

From a feminist perspective, people who identify themselves as belonging to non-dominant groups may experience disempowerment from the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they live. Lafromboise et al. (1990) advocated for empowering approaches when counselling First Nations clients and defined empowerment as the ability to control one’s life. These authors suggested specific approaches based on social learning theory because the emphasis on modeling and practicing community defined appropriate behaviors is compatible with First Nations cultural beliefs. Two approaches that were recommended by Lafromboise et al. (1990) are behaviour therapy and social network therapy. First Nations people tend to teach one another through modeling desired behaviors or skills (Restoule, 1997). Modeling enables the observer to perform the task when he/she feels confident to do so and when the time is right. However, before counsellors can presume to know how to help Native communities in culturally appropriate ways, they must first learn the cultural meaning of wellness from the perspective of contemporary community members (Gone, 2004). It is the community
members who define the social problems that need to be addressed and the appropriate standards of behaviour.

*Behaviour therapy.* Generally, First Nations people tend to focus more on the present rather than the past or future (Herring, 1998; Restoule, 1997). Therefore, behaviour therapy may be a culturally respectful approach given that behaviour therapists also focus on the present and are action oriented. When using behaviour therapy, clients are taught new skills through modelling and rehearsing desired behaviours. Moreover, many paraprofessionals are able to implement the techniques associated with behaviour therapy (Lafromboise et al., 1990) thus enabling people who live in remote communities to access culturally appropriate services. However, as with all therapies, the counselling goals must be determined in collaboration with the client and the reinforcers must be culturally appropriate.

*Network therapy.* Similar to counsellors with a feminist perspective, network therapists view individuals within their larger social systems and attempt to help individuals mobilize their social support networks. One of the primary goals of network therapy is to empower people to cope with life’s difficulties with the support of their significant others. Counsellors facilitate the formation of a supportive network for the client comprised of the client’s family and friends (Lafromboise et al., 1990). The purpose of the support network is to strengthen the client’s sense of social connectedness and guide the individual in resolving his or her difficulties. Many First Nations people believe that non-competitiveness and cooperation promotes the good of the group over the good of the individual (Restoule, 1997). An implied assumption in network therapy is that when clients experience a satisfactory level of social support, they are more likely to
maintain their changes outside of the counselling relationship (Lafromboise et al., 1990). In support of this assumption, Hazel and Mohatt (2001) found that half of the 78 Native respondents in their study attributed social support as crucial to the maintenance of their sobriety.

**Practicalities**

Several authors have provided practical suggestions in order to enhance the counselling experience for First Nations people. Thomason (1991) and Pinderhughes (1989) offered advice for the initial counselling session. The counsellor should allow for plenty of time for getting to know each other and use self disclosure as a means to encourage disclosure on the part of the client. Self-disclosure helps to equalize the power differential within the counselling relationship. The atmosphere should be relaxed and casual with the counsellor using an informal conversational style. The counsellor should take the lead from the client in terms of non-verbal behavior such as eye contact and tone of voice. Any support persons accompanying the client should be invited to participate. The counsellor should use the initial session to assess worldview, level of acculturation, extent of support systems, client expectation of the counselling process, and definition of presenting concerns and goals. Other effective strategies include: focusing on strengths by re-labeling behavior as adaptive and representative of surviving, empowering clients to develop new behaviors, and enhancing the client’s awareness of socio-political issues.

In order to meet the needs of First Nations clientele, the length of counselling sessions should be flexible (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990). This can be accomplished by scheduling the session before the lunch hour or scheduling the session for the last appointment of the day. Counselling sessions may need to occur beyond the
confines of the therapist’s office and drop in clients should be accommodated when possible. Ridley (1995) indicated that minority clients drop out of counselling prematurely more often than non-minority clients because of a weak therapeutic alliance and unfamiliarity about the nature of the counselling process. Ridley suggested that the conclusion of each counselling session should include a summary of themes and client accomplishments up to that point, suggestions of future directions, and the assignment of homework tasks. In addition, clients should be encouraged to return for the following session.

Related Research

Several themes were identified during a review and critique of the research focusing on cross-cultural counselling, multicultural counselling, and counselling First Nations people. The remainder of the Chapter is organized around three emergent themes: (a) the impact of cultural biases, (b) understanding the worldview of First Nations people, and (c) utilizing a wholistic approach to counselling. It is important to recognize that the themes are interrelated and are merely addressed separately for organizational purposes.

Cultural Biases

Cultural influences have shaped our ideas of healthy functioning. Pettifor (2001) pointed out that:

Prioritizing respect for the dignity of individual persons as higher than responsibility to society [as the CPA does in their code of ethics] it [sic] clearly a Euro-American cultural belief, and may not be accepted in cultures that place the individual secondary to family, community, or society. (p. 30)
Some First Nations cultures, such as the Dene in the Northwest Territories, emphasize the individual’s role within the family and the overall benefit to the community. Thus, it is important for counsellors to be aware of their own cultural biases and how these biases influence their interactions with others (Gone, 2004; Sue & Sue, 1990). Moreover, because individuals from a given ethnic community differ from one another, counsellors need to assess each client’s cultural identity by exploring values and beliefs. However, after experiencing intergenerational oppression, indigenous people may balk at discussing issues in meaningful ways until a trusting relationship is developed (Sue & Sue, 1990).

The implications of two research studies lend support to the importance of counsellors being aware of their own cultural biases and how these biases impact on the therapeutic relationship. Bennett and BigFoot-Sipes (1991) explored the effect of cultural orientation on counsellor preferences while Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) discussed the effect of conflicting values on counsellors’ perceptions of successful counselling sessions. These studies are further described below.

Bennett and BigFoot-Sipes (1991) conducted a paired-comparison study to gain information about the counsellor preferences of First Nations college students and White students, and to determine how presenting problems impact on their preferences. The authors used questionnaires designed to identify cultural orientation for First Nations students and racial-consciousness development for White students in order to assess the effects these intra-group variables have on counsellor preferences. Paired-comparison items for counsellor attributes were designed to elicit counsellor preferences. The results of the study indicated that students prefer counsellors who have similar attitudes and values. However, similar ethnicity was found to be more important to First Nations
students who identified strongly with their cultural orientation. Similar counsellor characteristics were preferred by both groups when the presenting problem was of a personal rather than an academic nature. The results of the Bennett and BigFoot-Sipes study imply the importance of expressing respect for diverse value systems.

Similar implications were drawn from Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) in which the authors investigated the multicultural counselling competencies of 181 Canadian counsellors by sending questionnaires and inventories to a random sample of members of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association. The majority of counsellors identified recognizing and acknowledging cultural differences, learning about cultural beliefs and practices, and accessing consultation and community resources as key components in cross-cultural counselling sessions that went well. Many counsellors reported that using basic counselling skills in culturally appropriate ways enhanced the counselling relationship. However, conflicting values and decisions made by clients, that counsellors believed were not in their best interests, were reported as components of sessions that, from the counsellors’ perspectives, did not go well. The results from this study indicated that the strongest predictors of multicultural counselling competencies were caseloads of culturally diverse clients, completion of coursework or a seminar on multicultural counselling, and case consultation. The authors pointed out that learning to bridge the differences in worldviews between counsellors and clients is necessary in order to enhance the effectiveness of counselling culturally different clients.

Neither of the above mentioned researchers indicated how to reconcile the differences in worldviews between counsellors and clients. However, Sue and Sue (1990) provided some suggestions to assist counsellors in bridging a gap between cultures:
respect and accept the individual, demonstrate unconditional positive regard for the client, understand the presenting problem from the client’s perspective, facilitate the exploration of the client’s values, and collaborate in arriving at an individual solution. Moreover, Pinderhughes (1989) supported these suggestions by stating that effective cross-cultural services require a cultural sensitivity marked by flexibility, openness, tolerance, warmth, empathy, and acceptance of differences.

**Worldview**

There are several beliefs and values which govern behavior amongst First Nations peoples, some of which have been previously mentioned. A traditional First Nations cultural belief is that the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of self are interrelated and need to be kept in balance in order to maintain health. The medicine wheel is symbolic of this belief. A counsellor who has developed competencies in the use of medicine wheel might integrate the medicine wheel during counselling to demonstrate how a presenting problem or a counselling goal impacts on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of the client. Of course this would only be done after confirming that utilizing the medicine wheel would be a good fit for the client. Other core values include: emotional restraint, sharing, and respect (Restoule, 1997). Emotional constraint is believed to foster self-control and group cohesion while sharing is indicative of honour and respect. In fact, respect is highly valued amongst First Nations peoples and stems from the belief that all living things are interrelated (France, 1997).

In addition, Peavy and Li (2003) discussed the use of silence and longer pauses between sentences among First Nations people. Contemplating what one wishes to say, particularly if it is a complex thought, is a reflection of wisdom. It is considered
disrespectful to talk too much while getting to know a person. Moreover, frequent or prolonged eye contact may convey disrespect. Counsellors should attempt to match the communication patterns of their clients when developing a working alliance.

Researchers have also found support for the importance of understanding the client’s worldview as a means of enhancing the counselling experience for indigenous people. For example, Smith and Morrissette (2001) asserted that the therapeutic approach will stem from an understanding of the client’s worldview. In addition, the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (1994) demonstrated the importance of cultural sensitivity. These two studies are described below.

Smith and Morrissette (2001) described a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach with the purpose of investigating the experiences of White counsellors who work with First Nations clients from Calgary and the surrounding area. Five male counsellors participated in two semi-structured tape-recorded interviews and one non-recorded interview. The interviews enabled the researcher to identify emerging themes. The interviewer used reflective comments and probing questions to encourage the co-researchers to reflect upon their experiences. Participants were provided with transcribed texts of the interviews and asked to comment on the accuracy of identified themes. The findings were presented to other White counsellors who had experience working with First Nations clientele and there was agreement “that the themes resonated with their experiences” (p. 77).

Smith and Morrissette (2001) found that understanding the worldview of clients was considered to be crucial and that worldview impacted upon clinical approaches utilized. From the views of counsellors involved in this study, clients want their
counsellors to understand how their personal and cultural histories contribute to their current experiences. These researchers underscored that: “Honouring difference, remaining flexible, and working creatively was perceived as critical to effective counselling” (p. 78). Moreover, focusing on the resiliency of First Nations people provided a positive framework in which to work. Understanding individual clients required an understanding of their families, communities, and cultural identities. Counsellors found that clinical effectiveness was enhanced by eliciting involvement and support from the client’s family members and elders during the therapeutic process. Listening to stories was viewed as a means to share information, facilitate disclosure, and offer alternative perspectives. Counsellors often sought out Native mentors and were encouraged to expand their role as counsellors and increase their participation at the community level.

In a phenomenological study financed by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (1994), researchers sought to determine the factors that: (a) encourage and inhibit First Nations students’ participation in counselling, (b) contribute to counsellor effectiveness, and (c) to determine what First Nations students want from their counsellors. Participants for the study were selected using a snowball sampling technique and included current, former, and non-attending First Nations students, as well as, counsellors, support workers, parents, and principals. All participants were residents of Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Loosely structured interviews which encouraged participants to tell their stories and thematic analysis of the interviews were chosen as data collection and analysis techniques because they were considered to be respectful of the cultural customs of First Nations people and were most likely to give First Nations
people a voice. The researchers attempted to be non-intrusive, trustworthy, and respectful of First Nations customs while conducting the research in order to demonstrate their respect for First Nations culture. Key contributors were encouraged to review the text and confirm that what was written was actually what they said and meant. Approval was sought from participants to include their voice in the publication of results. Moreover, a similar smaller study was conducted at the same time in Whitehorse, Yukon as a validity check.

Results indicated that parents and students want more culturally appropriate counselling services for First Nations youth. Although most students knew the role of the school counsellor, most preferred to approach a friend or a parent with personal problems. Counsellors who were successfully counselling First Nations students were thought of as friends by their clients instead of professionals. All participants thought that counsellors need better training in cultural knowledge and awareness, and in using effective counselling skills. Moreover, participants thought that non-Native counsellors should be immersed within the First Nations cultural community. Participants identified cultural sensitivity as critical in the counselling relationship and that counsellors needed to be trustworthy, especially in maintaining confidentiality.

Participants explained that counsellors could demonstrate these qualities by focusing on developing a relationship with their clients, being interested in the client as a whole person, and by disclosing something about themselves. It was considered helpful if counsellors spent time with students outside of the counselling relationship. Students described the ideal counsellor as someone who initiated the first meeting, encouraged them to drop into the counselling room, followed up after counselling was completed, and
was visible in the hallways. Moreover, students did not want counsellors to expect them to embrace their culture. They wanted counsellors to be understanding and accepting, and to provide resources and information. It was determined that counsellors need to be knowledgeable of issues which impact and have impacted on First Nations people such as loss of language and residential schooling. Participants shared that culture, class, and power differentials are accentuated when counsellors dress formally.

In addition, the researchers found that First Nations students preferred to seek counselling from a First Nations counsellor but a counsellor who was bi-cultural was also acceptable. A bi-cultural counsellor was defined as someone who felt comfortable in both Native and non-Native culture. Counsellors can work toward feeling comfortable in Native culture by immersing themselves in the culture, studying Native culture, participating in cultural activities, developing relationships with First Nations people, and learning cultural protocols from a cultural guide or mentor.

*Wholistic Approaches*

The Medical Services Branch of Health and Welfare Canada (1991) recognized the need for mental health services to rely on a wholistic approach when designing services for First Nations people. Specifically, the researchers for Health and Welfare Canada recommended the integration of traditional healing ceremonies into service delivery as a means of honouring indigenous worldviews. When First Nations people participate in traditional ceremonies, it strengthens their adherence to cultural values and their sense of social connectedness (LaFromboise et al., 1990; Thomason, 1991). Morissette (1994) also urged for the integration of traditional ceremonies into current counselling practice as a means to facilitate the client’s connection with extended family.
Inviting family, friends, and elders to join a healing circle for the client may be more appropriate than one to one counselling (France & McCormick, 1997; McCormick & France, 1995). Furthermore, any healing services such as circles, sweet grass ceremonies, and sweat lodge ceremonies should be facilitated by an elder (Lafromboise et al., 1990; Restoule, 1997) and held in the client’s familiar surroundings instead of in the therapist’s office (Thomason, 1991). Sue and Sue (1990) speculated that counselling First Nations clients might be more effective if it occurred in the client’s home with family and friends present due to the importance of extended family.

Although traditional healing ceremonies can be lengthy, there is an expectation among First Nations people that changes will occur quickly (Thomason, 1991). This expectation coupled with the statistics indicating the high drop out rate of First Nations clients reinforce the importance of facilitating a therapeutic experience during the first session.

Despite some commonalities among different First Nations groups, counsellors must be cautious to assess each individual’s worldview in order to choose culturally appropriate counselling methods. This can be a complex task for counsellors when one considers the cultural diversity amongst bands, generations, and urban and rural dwellers (Ministry of Education, 1994). Worldviews vary according to bands, level of acculturation, and idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals (LaFromboise et al., 1990; Sue & Sue, 1990; Thomason, 1991). Ridley (1995) advocated for the use of an idiographic approach to counselling minority clients. There are five principles guiding this approach: (a) each client is understood by her or his frame of reference; (b) a nomothetic perspective which focuses on characteristics of the cultural group may be
useful but is not sufficient for understanding an individual; (c) individuals have multiple roles and identities; (d) a comprehensive understanding of an individual requires examination of the individual’s biological, psychological, and sociological experiences; and (e) a variety of theoretical orientations and interventions may be selected to develop individualized treatment plans for client issues. Ridley also identified three process goals in multicultural counselling: establishing a working alliance by focusing on the development of trust; exploring the racial dynamics in the counselling relationship; and obtaining a counselling agreement in respect to roles, expectations, and goals.

Three research studies are described next to illustrate the importance of Ridley’s (1995) suggestion to utilize a wholistic approach in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of individuals. In the first study, researchers explored First Nations students’ satisfaction with school counselling programs (Dolan, 1995) while results in the second study emphasized working in collaboration with First Nations communities (McBride Management Ltd., 2001). The third study was undertaken to evaluate a wholistic healing program serving several First Nations communities (Native Counselling Services of Alberta, 2001).

Dolan (1995) conducted a study to determine the level of satisfaction with school counselling programs available to First Nations students in Nova Scotia and to determine if there was any significant difference between the counselling services of band-run schools and provincial schools. Results of questionnaires were confirmed through individual semi-structured interviews with participants. Standardized questions were used during the interview and participants were encouraged to elaborate and clarify their responses. In addition, verbatim comments were included in the results. This procedure
helped to avoid potential oversimplification of complex issues (Mertens, 1998). The interviews were coded separately by three individuals who were not familiar with the hypothesis of the study in order to reduce the potential for researcher bias in the identification of emerging themes.

Consistent with the findings from the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (1994), Dolan’s (1995) surveys and interviews indicated that the majority of First Nations students perceived counselling services as inadequate and rarely accessed the programs. The majority of students were not satisfied with the counselling services available to them and 70% of the participants indicated that they had not discussed personal problems with a counsellor despite feeling that counselling was an essential service. First Nations students indicated that counsellors should be more visible in the schools and should offer a wider range of services, particularly services aimed at enhancing cultural identities and cultural affiliations. However, students attending band-based schools perceived that there were more counselling services available to them. Overall, students identified enhancing self-esteem by developing a strong cultural identity as the most important counselling need.

Researchers with McBride Management Ltd. (2001) conducted a study to examine reasons for the over-representation of First Nations students in programs for students with behavioural disorders in British Columbia. The researchers collected data from the files of First Nations students who were identified as having severe behavioural disorders, from First Nation focus groups in eight of British Columbia’s school districts, and from interviews with senior school district staff. The interviews and focus groups revealed congruent themes in regards to the issues of educating and addressing behavioural
challenges of First Nations students. Relevant themes included: a) the importance of the First Nations community participating in planning and implementing programs; b) the history of residential schooling and its impact on culture, parenting skills, and trust; c) systemic racism and stereotyping; and d) the need for training and awareness of First Nations culture. Furthermore, the researchers noted that empirical research has validated some of the strategies that were identified as effective by the district staff and First Nations groups. These strategies included: consultative processes with First Nations communities, development of cultural competencies, enhanced parental involvement, improvements to assessments, and building resiliency.

Qualitative data collected from student files indicated that students who were perceived as having severe behavioural disorders lacked the necessary social skills to develop positive relationships and, consequently, had poor self-esteem. Poverty was prevalent in their lives. Some students had been affected by a suicide of a close family member, while others had witnessed violence in their homes or had been abused themselves. Overall, teachers did not appear to be aware of the context in which many of the students lived. However, some teachers made personal connections with their students and established collaborative partnerships with the First Nations community. In order to accommodate the needs of First Nations students, some districts employed indigenous support workers, developed First Nations programs, offered First Nations counselling services, provided childcare services, supported “a sense of place and belonging” for First Nations students, incorporated indigenous art and culture within the school design and in displays, offered parenting programs in the community, sought the involvement of a First
Nations advisory committee, and held meetings within the community instead of within the schools.

The diversity of First Nations communities was seen as a challenge to providing effective services, particularly in urban centers. The First Nation focus groups indicated that in order for First Nations advisory groups to be most effective, a high level of trust was required and the consultation process needed to include open and balanced dialogue. Moreover, the First Nations focus groups perceived “a cultural divide between a largely Euro-centric workforce … and the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people” (p. 43). The focus groups cited problem-solving approaches and ways of showing respect as examples of cultural differences. Parents often declined to share information with the school out of fear that it would be misinterpreted and reported to child protection services. Furthermore, some focus group members perceived that there was a “lack of culturally appropriate approaches to treatment in the mental health system” (p. 48). The focus groups felt that there was a lack of cultural competence that resulted in misguided efforts to address First Nations culture and that there was a lack of awareness in regards to their economic circumstances.

While researchers from the previous two studies identified the need for more wholistic services, the following study exemplifies the benefits of utilizing a wholistic approach in counselling. Native Counselling Services of Alberta (2001) conducted a cost-benefit analysis of Hollow Water’s Community Holistic Circle Healing process. Hollow Water is an area comprised of four First Nations communities in Manitoba. The Community Holistic Circle Healing (CHCH) was derived in response to the need of First Nations people to heal from the effects of sexual abuse and is based on the teachings of
the Anishnabe or Algonquin people. Sharing circles are facilitated by Native healers and elders for victims, victimizers, and their families. The circle symbolizes respect for the uniqueness of individuals and trust in the individual’s capacity to determine his/her healing at his/her speed. Silence in the circle is respected and viewed as beneficial in developing awareness and expressing the truth.

The research team collaborated with the Hollow Water community in order to develop a common understanding of CHCH’s healing process. Creating spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual balance is believed to be the condition that affects change and results in a benefit to the whole community. The research team used a participatory framework in order to ensure the results were useful to both the community and the researchers. The researchers noted that the participatory approach enabled the researchers to observe cultural protocols which facilitated the development of trust and respect between the researchers and the community members. Data was generated through questionnaires and via formal and informal interviews. Respondents included: community and band members, R.C.M.P. current and former staff of CHCH, educators, psychologists, and justice system participants.

The results indicated that the financial cost of operating the CHCH was significantly lower than the cost of conventional justice system services. Moreover the recidivism rate for sexual offenders who participated in CHCH was 2% compared to 13% for offenders who did not participate in this process. Community members perceived a progression towards health and wellness within their community as indicated by more people completing their education, enhanced parenting skills, a sense of empowerment,
broadening of community resources, an increased sense of safety, a decrease in violent incidences, and a return to traditional ceremonies.

**Critical Analysis of Research Results**

Overall, the research methods were qualitative in nature; however, some combined qualitative with quantitative methods of data collection. Most researchers established credibility by using a number of different strategies such as: (a) ensuring that themes were repeating, (b) conducting member checks, and (c) using triangulation. Transferability was addressed by providing extensive descriptions of the location, context, and culture of the participants. Some researchers attempted to minimize the influence of their judgments thus strengthening the confirmability of their research findings.

For example, Smith and Morrissette (2001) described several strategies that were used to enhance the credibility of their study. Participants were interviewed on three separate occasions which enabled the researcher to identify salient themes and shared experiences of the White male counsellors. Credibility was further enhanced by conducting member checks: Participants were asked to verify and comment on the identified themes based on the transcripts of the interviews. Dolan (1995) established credibility through the use of member checks. After the participants completed questionnaires, Dolan confirmed the results of the questionnaires by interviewing the participants. The researchers for the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (1994) established credibility by conducting member checks and by using triangulation. Informants were encouraged to review the results to ensure correspondence between their perceptions and the way the researchers portrayed their viewpoints. Multiple sources
representing various stakeholders were included in the study as a method to ensure the validity of the emerging themes.

Furthermore, Smith and Morrissette (2001) established confirmability of their findings by presenting the data and results to three different groups of White counsellors who had experience working with First Nations clients. Confirmability was strengthened in Dolan’s study by having the interviews coded by independent raters. Although the informants of the study conducted by the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (1994) were selected from a limited geographical area, a concurrent study that was conducted in the Yukon helped enhance the transferability of the findings. However, the findings are limited to the experience of students and may not represent the viewpoints of First Nations people in other contexts.

The findings in many of the research studies focusing on cross-cultural counselling, multicultural counselling, and counselling First Nations people had limited generalizability. For example, Bennett and BigFoot-Sipes (1991) relied on convenience sampling. The researchers recruited participants from Oklahoma colleges: White participants through undergraduate psychology classes and First Nations students from minority student affairs offices. When convenience sampling is used, the results cannot be generalized beyond the population pool (Mertens, 1998). Similarly, the transferability of the findings in the Smith and Morrissette (2001) study is also questionable. Only male counsellors were interviewed, the sample size was small, it was assumed that the counsellors were competent in cross-cultural counselling, and the sampling frame was limited to practitioners in Calgary and the surrounding area. The results of the Dolan
(1995) study also had limited generalizability in that the sample was drawn from students belonging to the Micmac Nation and living on reserves in Cape Breton.

In addition to the limitations already discussed, there are others worth noting. For example, the two groups of participants in the Bennett and BigFoot-Sipes (1991) study had dissimilar characteristics other than ethnicity: The average annual family income for White participants was higher than for First Nations participants. Furthermore, due to the topic of inquiry, participants may have responded to items in socially desirable ways thereby skewing the data (Mertens, 1998). Despite the limitations in individual studies, the various research studies reported similar findings and supported the views in the academic literature on cross-cultural counselling.

The amount of research available that addresses the central topic of integrating culturally appropriate methods into current counselling practice appears to be insufficient considering the many issues facing First Nations people. The intergenerational impact of oppressive lived experiences increases the likelihood that indigenous people will want to turn to counselling as a means of overcoming their challenges. Yet, a review of the literature uncovered commonalities in cultural beliefs but failed to discover any fundamental differences. Counsellors providing services to First Nations people would benefit from future research endeavours focused on exploring the impact of divergent First Nations cultural beliefs on the counselling process. For example, research that explores cultural diversity between bands and geographic locations would be useful to counsellors, especially when practicing in urban centers. Being aware of divergent beliefs and values between particular bands or nations might further guide counsellors in choosing culturally appropriate methods.
Summary

Despite the limited amount of available research exploring the topic of integrating culturally appropriate methods into current counselling practices for First Nations people, the studies do highlight significant themes for consideration. In this regard, counsellors need to be aware of their cultural biases, seek to understand and respect the worldview of clients, and utilize a wholistic approach to helping. Furthermore, counselling theories and techniques must fit within the value and belief systems of individual clients (France & McCormick, 1997; McCormick & France, 1995; Pinderhughes, 1989). First Nations people are a diverse population with divergent beliefs, values, and worldviews (Garrett & Herring, 2001). Therefore, it is improbable that one specific theory or approach will be culturally respectful for all Native clients.

With this in mind, several authors have advocated for the use of specific theories in guiding First Nations counselling sessions. For example, both feminist perspectives and constructivist approaches emphasize the impact of social and cultural contexts in the development of presenting problems. The spirit of these theories minimizes inherent power imbalances within the client – counsellor relationship and is compatible with traditional beliefs and values of First Nations people. Moreover, counselling orientations based on empowerment and emancipatory themes may assist First Nations clients in overcoming both internalized and externalized forms of oppression (Lafromboise et al., 1990; Peavy & Li, 2003). Behaviour therapy and social network therapy may also be culturally respectful approaches because the emphasis on modeling and interdependence is compatible with First Nations cultural beliefs.
Cultural misunderstandings can negatively impact on the therapeutic alliance between counsellor and client by creating mistrust and a perception of being devalued. Conversely, learning about First Nations cultural beliefs and traditions, collaborating with clients and their social supports, and seeking consultation with respected community members facilitate the development of trust. Equalizing the power differential within the counselling relationship strengthens the therapeutic alliance. During the initial session, the culturally respectful counsellor will assess worldview, level of acculturation, extent of support systems, client expectation of the counselling process, and definition of presenting concerns and goals.

Conclusion

Cultural awareness and understanding the client’s worldview are key factors in providing successful counselling services to first Nations people (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; McBride Management Ltd., 2001; Ministry of Education, 1994; Smith & Morissette, 2001). Moreover, many authors noted the cultural diversity amongst First Nations people and cautioned against overgeneralizations (LaFromboise et al., 1990; Ministry of Education, 1994; Sue & Sue, 1990; Thomason, 1991). Thus the importance of conducting individualized assessments can not be overstated. Although several themes emerged as a result of a literature review, it is clear from the responses of First Nations people that counsellors have not yet been able to consistently integrate culturally respectful approaches within their practices. Until counselling services become culturally responsive, the counselling profession will continue to be viewed as perpetuating oppressive experiences in the lives of non-dominant groups.
CHAPTER III

Procedures

The search process for potential research studies with a focus on counselling First Nations people included accessing on-line databases available on the Campus Alberta Applied Psychology website such as Academic Search Premier, Psych Info, and ERIC. Keywords used in the search process included: First Nations, aboriginal, indigenous, minorities, counselling, mental health services, multicultural counselling, cross-cultural counselling, cultural values, and cultural beliefs. However, it soon became apparent that the most relevant literature was not accessible via the on-line databases. Due to the relative geographic isolation and lack of accessible academic resources in the author’s home community, sites on the World Wide Web were searched and personal networks were accessed. An e-mail to the local Psychological Association resulted in several responses from psychologists who were interested in culturally appropriate counselling for First Nations people and were willing to loan journals and articles which contained relevant material.

An in-depth literature review of articles and research studies addressing culturally appropriate counselling methodology for First Nations clientele was undertaken in order to provide conceptual foundations for the project. Literature reviewed for the project had a primary focus on cross-cultural counselling, multicultural counselling, and counselling First Nations people. Several synonyms were acceptable for the term “First Nations people” such as indigenous people, Aboriginal people, and Native people. Research studies conducted in Canada received preference for inclusion in the literature review as a means to enhance relevancy for Canadian counsellors. Research studies were critically
analyzed to ensure that the criteria for judging quality of research (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) have been fulfilled (Mertens, 1998).

Developing the Manual

Topics chosen for inclusion in the manual were based on the emergent themes in the literature review and were identified as having utility for counsellors who are providing counselling services to First Nations people. Given the feminist orientation of this project and the author’s representation of a dominant group that has been historically oppressive towards First Nations people, informal First Nations consultants were involved in the project to ensure that the emerging content was authentic (Mertens, 1998). No aggregated information was collected from informal consultants, nor reported on, within this project. The final product resulted in a manual where the author identifies and describes methodologies and policies that comprise culturally appropriate counselling services for First Nations people with detailed explanations of how counsellors can integrate these methodologies into their current practices.
APPENDIX

The manual entitled *Responding to First Nations Voices: Integrating Culturally Appropriate Methods into Current Counselling Practices in Canada* was written by Joanne Burns and supervised Dr. Gina Wong-Wylie as a final project requirement for a Master of Counselling Degree from Campus Alberta Applied Psychology.
Responding to First Nations Voices

Integrating Culturally Appropriate Methods

into

Current Counselling Practices in Canada

Joanne Burns

Campus Alberta Applied Psychology

December 2006
# Table of Contents

Why Strive for Culturally Appropriate Counselling Services? ........................................2

Agency Policies .................................................................................................................. 4

The Physical Environment ................................................................................................. 6

Counselling Approaches .................................................................................................... 9
  A Feminist Perspective ........................................................................................................ 9
  Constructivism .................................................................................................................. 10
  Behaviour Therapy ............................................................................................................ 11
  Network Therapy .............................................................................................................. 12

Getting Started .................................................................................................................... 12
  Gaining Cultural Knowledge ............................................................................................. 14
  Assessing Cultural Identity ............................................................................................... 15
  Practical Suggestions ....................................................................................................... 16

Summary ............................................................................................................................... 18

References ............................................................................................................................. 20
Why Strive for Culturally Appropriate Counselling Services?

The need to develop culturally appropriate counselling services has been identified in the codes of ethics for counsellors and psychologists. The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2000) contains standards relating to cross-cultural counselling in all four of the ethical principles. Furthermore, each revision made to the CPA’s Code of Ethics reflects a deepening commitment to respect the cultural values of diverse populations (Pettifor, 2001). The Canadian Counselling Association’s (CCA) Code of Ethics (CCA, 1999), directs counsellors to understand, respect, and be sensitive to diversity while the Feminist Therapy Institute’s (FTI) Code of Ethics guides counsellors not only to address cultural diversities, but also oppression (FTI, 1999).

First Nations people have experienced historical oppression including colonization, residential schooling, systemic racism, and stereotyping. Due to the impact of intergenerational oppression, Canadian counsellors are likely to be providing their services to First Nations people at some point in their career.
Despite the counselling profession’s commitment to strive toward culture-infused counselling, First Nations clients are twice as likely as White clients to drop out of counselling after the first session (LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990). Although there is abundant literature focusing on multicultural counselling, there are considerably less resources available to guide counsellors in the provision of effective counselling services, specifically for First Nations clientele.

**The purpose of this manual is to support counsellors and agencies in honouring the needs, values, beliefs, and cultural traditions of First Nations people by facilitating the integration of culturally appropriate methods and policies into current counselling practices.**

A word of caution for users of this manual: People who identify themselves as belonging to a First Nations cultural group are a heterogeneous population with divergent beliefs, values, and worldviews. Therefore, the information contained in this manual may be considered as culturally inappropriate from the perspective of individual clients.
Agency Policies

Typically, counselling sessions are conducted within the confines of an agency’s building: usually in a counsellor’s office or in a separate counselling room. The expectation is that only the person or persons directly affected by the presenting problem will attend the session. During the initial session, counsellors or intake workers explain the parameters of confidentiality, request that clients sign necessary forms, and collect some background information. Usually, agency forms are written in either English or French. However, these common agency practices may not be compatible with the values and beliefs of indigenous people.

Inherent power imbalances exist within the First Nations counselling context wherein clients from a non-dominant culture are seeking services to overcome difficulties from counsellors who are perceived as experts in resolving problems and who also may enjoy positions of privilege through identification with the dominant culture (Cayleff, 1986; FTI, 1999). The power imbalance is further accentuated when access to counselling services is limited to the counsellor’s familiar environment and when counsellors dress in formal attire (Ministry of Education in British Columbia, 1994). One way of minimizing inherent power imbalances is to engage in outreach counselling wherein counselling services are conducted in environments familiar to clients. Examples of such environments include: community health centres, local women’s centres, friendship centres, and band offices.
Another way of minimizing inherent power imbalances within the counselling context is to demystify the counselling process by providing clients with an explanation about the process of counselling (Sands, 1998). Working collaboratively with clients in developing counselling tasks and goals, and using a tentative approach also contribute to the equalization of power within relationships. Furthermore, Thomason (1991) and Pinderhughes (1989) suggested using self-disclosure when appropriate as a means to facilitate client disclosure. Self-disclosure has the potential to equalize the power differential within the counselling relationship by normalizing client concerns and also contributes to the development of trust.

Expecting First Nations people to complete forms in one of Canada’s official languages may not be appropriate. According to Statistics Canada (2003), aboriginal people have lower English and French literacy rates than non-aboriginal people. Agencies may wish to have forms translated into the indigenous languages commonly spoken in their service area. An alternative to written translation is to provide an audio translation. Because of the significance of oral history and teaching, First Nations people may be able to speak but not read indigenous languages. Furthermore, discussing confidentiality in languages other than the client’s mother tongue may hamper the counsellor’s ability to obtain informed consent. Seeking assistance from a translator may facilitate the initial intake process.

Many First Nations groups value social connectedness and social responsibility (Herring, 1998). A prominent belief is that one person’s problem is the community’s problem (Lafromboise, et al., 1990). This implies that whoever accompanies the individual to the counselling appointment should be invited to join the client in the
counselling session. In fact, several authors (France & McCormick, 1997; Thomason, 1991) have suggested that First Nations people may want to include others in their healing journey. Moreover, research has indicated that eliciting involvement and support from the client’s family members and from elders has the potential to enhance the clinical effectiveness of interventions (Smith & Morrissette, 2001). Furthermore, clients are better able to maintain their changes between counselling sessions when they perceive a satisfactory level of social support (Hazel & Mohatt, 2001; Lafromboise et al., 1990).

Agencies wishing to enhance counselling experiences for First Nations people would be well advised to seek the involvement of a First Nations advisory committee and include indigenous people among governing directors. Moreover, the staff employed within an organization should be culturally representative of the people who are seeking services through the agency. To increase staff competencies in counselling First Nations people, counsellors should carry a caseload of culturally diverse clients, complete coursework or participate in workshops on multicultural counselling, and receive ongoing case consultation (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001).

**The Physical Environment**

The counselling environment should support a sense of place and belonging for First Nations clients (McBride Management Ltd., 2001). Incorporating indigenous art and representations of First Nations culture are steps towards creating a sense of inclusion. For example, a medicine wheel is symbolic of healing. The medicine wheel represents the interconnectedness of all living things. The eastern portion of the medicine wheel symbolizes mental health, clarity, springtime, the sun, and old age.
The southern section represents spiritual health, trust, summertime, the earth, and childhood. The west stands for emotional health, dreams, autumn, the moon, and adolescents. Finally, the north symbolizes physical health, cleansing, wintertime, the sky, and adulthood.

Another way of supporting a sense of belonging is to have a variety of sacred grass on hand. Providing an opportunity for clients who wish to smudge as a way of commencing a counselling session demonstrates respect for cultural traditions. Moreover, integrating traditional healing ceremonies within a culturally appropriate context may help re-establish feelings of social connectedness and empowerment. Smudging is a ceremonial way of releasing negative energy from the body, mind, and spirit. Some First Nations people use smudging as a way to prepare themselves for important events. The type of sacred grass chosen depends on the purpose of the smudge and on the traditional teachings in the community.

In general, tobacco is used to clarify the mind, sage facilitates trust and is thought to drive out bad feelings, sweet grass enables understanding and is often used as a blessing, and cedar is for cleansing or to create positive feelings.

Whenever possible, ceremonial activities should be conducted in the client’s familiar environment instead of within the confines of the counsellor’s office. Hiring elders to facilitate traditional ceremonies is the best way of ensuring that wholistic approaches are implemented in culturally respectful ways (Laframboise et al., 1990;
Restoule, 1997). Wisdom rather than age signifies elder status. When recruiting elders, it is best to consult with the aboriginal community because it may be more appropriate for a person with a First Nations identity to approach elders with such a request. Offering financial remuneration for services demonstrates that knowledge, skills, and time are valued. Moreover, many First Nations people struggle financially and truly appreciate receiving supplemental income.

A third way of creating a sense of belonging concerns the layout of furniture. Chairs in the counselling room should be arranged forming a circle when providing services to more than one person. The use of circle formations minimizes perceptions of hierarchy and facilitates active participation from those sitting in the circle. A circle symbolizes the interconnectedness and equality of all living things and is representative of the medicine wheel where traditional First Nations people gathered during times of change. Using a sharing circle can be particularly effective when counselling families or when facilitating groups. A sacred object held by the person speaking encourages one person to speak at a time and teaches turn taking. The object is usually something that holds special significance to one or more persons in the group. Typically, the object chosen has interesting tactile characteristics such as a carved stick, a stone, or an eagle feather. The object is passed from person to person in a clockwise direction.
Counselling Approaches

First Nations people are a diverse population whose beliefs, values, and worldviews vary along with acculturation, nation or band affiliation, geographical upbringing, age, and socio-economic status (Garrett & Herring, 2001). Because of this diversity, it is improbable that one specific theory or approach will be perceived as culturally respectful by all Native clients. However, several approaches have been consistently recommended in the relevant literature. Some common themes among culturally respectful approaches include: a consideration of the socio-cultural context, facilitation of empowerment to overcome adversities, and collaboration. Keep in mind that before counsellors can presume to know how to help Native communities in culturally appropriate ways, they must first learn the cultural meaning of wellness from the perspective of contemporary community members (Gone, 2004). It is the community members who define the social problems that need to be addressed and the appropriate standards of behaviour.

A Feminist Perspective

Taking a feminist perspective is compatible when counselling First Nations people because feminist theory emphasizes the impact of social and cultural contexts in the development of presenting problems. In other words, problems are viewed as arising from social inequities and are seen as ineffective reactions to oppressive circumstances rather than a reflection of intrapsychic dysfunction. Because many First Nations people have experienced oppression, a counselling orientation based on empowerment and emancipatory themes may assist First Nations clients in overcoming both internalized and
externalized forms of oppression (Lafromboise et al., 1990; Peavy & Li, 2003). From a feminist perspective, the counsellor’s role is to assist clients in overcoming oppressive circumstances and in gaining control over the course of their lives. Problems are depathologized in order to empower clients to make changes in themselves and within their environment (Sands, 1998). Counsellors who utilize a feminist approach focus on client strengths by re-labeling behavior as adaptive and representative of ways the client has learned to survive under oppressive circumstances.

**Constructivism**

Peavy (2000) and Peavy and Li (2003) suggested a constructivist approach to intercultural counselling because of the emphasis on respect for diversity, helping based on cultural hypotheses, and collaboration. Constructivism is compatible with the First Nations belief that there should be no interference in an individual’s decision making process: One should neither give nor receive advice or direct instruction (Herring, 1998; Restoule, 1997). Similar to counsellors who embrace a feminist perspective, constructivist counsellors view individuals within their sociocultural context and use a tentative approach when facilitating the change process. One of the primary goals for a constructivist counsellor is to increase the client’s capacity to participate in social life (Peavy, 2000). This goal fits with the values of social interconnectedness and social responsibility (Herring, 1998). The spirit of the constructivist approach minimizes the inherent power imbalances within the client – counsellor relationship and is compatible with traditional beliefs and values of First Nations people.
Lafromboise et al. (1990) advocated for empowering approaches when counselling First Nations clients and defined empowerment as the ability to control one’s life. These authors suggested specific approaches based on social learning theory because the emphasis on modeling and practicing community defined appropriate behaviors is compatible with First Nations cultural beliefs. Two approaches that were recommended by Lafromboise et al. (1990) are behaviour therapy and social network therapy.

**Behaviour Therapy**

Generally, First Nations people tend to focus more on the present rather than the past or future (Herring, 1998; Restoule, 1997). Behaviour therapists also focus on the present and are action oriented. Clients are taught new skills through modeling and rehearsing desired behaviour. First Nations people also tend to teach one another through modeling desired behaviors or skills (Restoule, 1997). Modeling enables the observer to perform the task when he or she feels confident to do so and when the time is right.

In addition to the compatibility of behaviour therapy and First Nations worldviews, many paraprofessionals are able to implement the techniques associated with behaviour therapy (Lafromboise et al., 1990). When paraprofessionals are skilled in applying intervention techniques, people who live in isolated or remote communities are able to access services from local service providers thus minimizing any perceived power differentials within the counselling context. However, counsellors using behaviour therapy must remember to consult with the local aboriginal community to determine how the members define appropriate standards of behaviour. As with all therapies, the
counselling goals will also be determined in collaboration with the client and the reinforce must be culturally appropriate.

**Network Therapy**

Network therapists view individuals within their larger social systems and attempt to help individuals mobilize their social support networks. One of the primary goals of network therapy is to empower people to cope with life’s difficulties with the support of their significant others. Counsellors facilitate the formation of a supportive network for the client comprised of the client’s family and friends (Lafromboise et al., 1990). The purpose of the support network is to strengthen the client’s sense of social connectedness and guide the individual in resolving his or her difficulties. Many First Nations people believe that non-competitiveness and cooperation promotes the good of the group over the good of the individual (Restoule, 1997). An implied assumption in network therapy is that when clients experience a satisfactory level of social support, they are more likely to maintain their changes outside of the counselling relationship (Lafromboise et al., 1990). In support of this assumption, Hazel and Mohatt (2001) found that half of the Native respondents in their study thought that social support was crucial to the maintenance of their sobriety.

**Getting Started**

This manual is designed to be helpful for all counsellors working with First Nations clientele regardless of the counsellor’s or the client’s cultural identification. In a sense, counselling can be thought of as a cross-cultural interaction even when counsellors and
clients identify themselves as belonging to similar ethnic groups. According to several authors (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Cayleff, 1986; Ibrahim & Arredondo, 1986; Sue, Arredondo, & M'Davis, 1992), culture encompasses such variables as ethnicity, race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Therefore, even when a counsellor and a client identify themselves as First Nations, their cultural identities may be quite divergent. First Nations people are a heterogeneous group with different lived experiences. For example, some indigenous people live on reserves while others are raised in urban centers, some folks attended residential schools while others attended public school, some children are taught to embrace their heritage and others are encouraged to identify with the dominant culture. Although only 25% of First Nations people are able to converse in their mother tongue, there are at least 14 different indigenous languages in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Arthur and Collins (2005) outlined a conceptual model reflecting core multicultural competencies. Their model includes a description of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills that are required to demonstrate competence in cross-cultural counselling. Three core competency domains are: a) cultural awareness of self including assumptions, values, and biases; b) cultural awareness of others or understanding the worldview of individual clients; and c) a culturally sensitive working alliance. Reflecting on cultural identity can help counsellors avoid inadvertently perpetuating oppressive practices such as gender role expectations, cultural encapsulation, and ethnocentrism. Predictors of multicultural counselling competencies include: experience counselling culturally diverse clients, completion of coursework or seminars on multicultural counselling, and engaging in case consultation (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001).
Gaining Cultural Knowledge

Research has indicated that First Nations people want more culturally appropriate counselling services (Ministry of Education in British Columbia, 1997). Increasing competencies in culturally appropriate counselling with First Nations people requires knowledge and awareness about First Nations cultures. Keeping in mind the diversity among First Nations people, counsellors should concentrate their efforts on learning about the history and culture of the First Nations bands in their immediate service areas. Counsellors need to be knowledgeable concerning the issues which impact and have impacted on First Nations people such as colonization, loss of language, and residential schooling.

There are several internet sites worth exploring to learn about the culture, traditions, and customs of local tribes. After conducting some preliminary searches, approaching Native friendship centers or Native service providers, speaking to respected elders or Native leaders, visiting your local museum, and attending celebrations hosted by First Nations groups are excellent ways of confirming and enhancing cultural knowledge.
Counsellors who are providing ongoing services to First Nations people may want to seek out a trusted aboriginal advisor or cultural guide to help them navigate their way through the complex intricacies inherent in cross-cultural interactions.

**Assessing Cultural Identity**

It is worth stressing the importance of assessing each individual’s cultural identity and avoiding assumptions based on cultural stereotyping. Do not expect First Nations people to embrace their cultural heritage. Help the client to explore how ethnicity, gender, geographic upbringing, sexual orientation, social class, and religious beliefs intersect to shape cultural identity. Seek an understanding of how the client perceives the importance of each factor in influencing the client’s beliefs and values. Ask the client to identify a cultural reference group, discuss the degree of involvement the client has with his or her cultural group as compared to the dominant cultural group, and explore language preferences. The purpose of assessing the client’s cultural identity is to understand how the client views him or herself and to determine what is important to the client. Cultural identity influences the meaning attributed to issues brought forth in counselling and the appropriateness of potential interventions (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Pedersen, 1997).

Moreover, cultural sensitivity is critical in the formation of a strong working alliance. Before assessing a client’s cultural identity, counsellors should first be aware of their own cultural identities and how divergent identities might influence the counselling relationship. For example, consider for a moment your race, ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and spiritual beliefs. How have these factors influenced who you see yourself to be? What impact do these variables have on your
beliefs, values, and worldview? How have these factors placed you in positions of privilege? People who identify with multiple non-dominate cultures are more likely to experience compounded oppression. Moreover, people who have experienced oppression are likely to have internalized some of the negative messages they received while people who perpetuate oppression are likely to have internalized culturally oppressive attitudes (see Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2006). When counsellors appear to be of a dominant culture such as male, middle class, White, or heterosexual then there is a potential for clients to perceive them as being representative of oppression.

Learning to bridge the differences in worldviews between counsellors and clients is necessary in order to enhance the effectiveness of counselling culturally different clients (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001). Sue and Sue (1990) provided some suggestions to assist counsellors in bridging a gap between cultures: respect and accept the individual, demonstrate unconditional positive regard for the client, understand the presenting problem from the client’s perspective, facilitate the exploration of the client’s values, and collaborate in arriving at an individual solution. Moreover, Pinderhughes (1989) supported these suggestions by stating that effective cross-cultural services require a cultural sensitivity marked by flexibility, openness, tolerance, warmth, empathy, and acceptance of differences.

**Practical Suggestions**

Clients who are members of non-dominant groups drop out of counselling prematurely more often than clients from dominant groups because of a weak therapeutic alliance and unfamiliarity about the nature of the counselling process (Ridley, 1995).
Therefore, counsellors should use the initial session to assess worldview, level of acculturation, extent of support systems, client expectations of the counselling process, and to collaboratively define presenting concerns and goals (Thomason, 1991; Pinderhughes, 1989). Developing a trusting relationship with clients, taking a wholistic view of people, and using appropriate self-disclosures are additional ways of building a strong working alliance. In subsequent sessions, the counsellor is advised to seek confirmation that the process is a good fit for the client, that the counselling goals are being met, and to determine from the client’s perspective what would be a helpful focus for the current session.

From a First Nations perspective, contemplating what one wishes to say is a reflection of wisdom. Consequently, many indigenous people tend to use longer pauses between sentences and are more comfortable with silence than are White people (Peavy & Li, 2003). Depending on cultural identity, it may be considered disrespectful to talk too much while getting to know a person. Certainly in most First Nations cultures, elders are expected to speak first. Moreover, frequent or prolonged eye contact may also convey disrespect. Because of the diversity in belief systems among indigenous people, counsellors should attempt to match the communication patterns of their clients when developing a working alliance.

Counsellors working in institutional environments might consider spending time with potential clients outside of the counselling relationship. Students have described the ideal counsellor as someone who initiated the first meeting, encouraged them to drop into the counselling room, followed up after counselling was completed, and was visible in the hallways (Ministry of Education in British Columbia, 1994). However, counsellors must
be cautious not to create dual relationships that could impair professional judgments or result in conflicts of interest (CCA, 1999; CPA, 2000).

In order to meet the needs of First Nations clientele, the length of counselling sessions should be flexible (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990). This can be accomplished by scheduling the session before the lunch hour or as the last appointment of the day. Ridley (1995) suggested that the conclusion of each counselling session should include a summary of themes and client accomplishments up to that point, suggestions of future directions, and the assignment of homework tasks. In addition, clients should be encouraged to return for the following session.

**Summary**

In keeping with the counselling profession’s commitment to strive toward culture-infused counselling and in response to the expressed dissatisfaction from First Nations people with current counselling services, this manual is offered as a means of facilitating the integration of culturally appropriate methods and policies into current counselling practices. Honouring the needs, values, beliefs, and cultural traditions of First Nations people requires counsellors to work towards minimizing inherent power imbalances within the therapeutic relationship, seek consultation with First Nations mentors, approach counselling from a culturally respectful theoretical orientation, and ensure that interventions are a good fit for individual clients.

For a more comprehensive discussion on integrating culturally appropriate methods into current counselling practices for First Nations clientele and to access a copy
of this manual, the reader is invited to link to Athabasca University’s Digital Thesis and Reading Room at http://library.athabascau.ca/DTPR/index.php.
References


CHAPTER IV

Synthesis and Implications

It is anticipated that this manual will fill the void of available resources to guide counsellors in systematically integrating culturally appropriate methods into their current practices. The manual will directly benefit counsellors who provide services for First Nations people. On my own initiative, counselling agencies across Canada will be contacted and the manual will be distributed to interested agencies. With more counsellors integrating culturally appropriate methods into their practices, there will be an increase in culturally appropriate counselling services available for First Nations people thus enhancing the level of satisfaction with the counselling experience. Moreover, First Nations people may be more inclined to access counselling services and remain engaged in the therapeutic process (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001). As a result, First Nations people will have the opportunity to experience empowerment in the process of overcoming their challenges. Perhaps most significantly, First Nations people who have participated in various research studies may sense that their voices have finally been heard.

Despite the potential benefits of this project, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. First of all, this project was completed by a White woman who has lived a privileged life. Although every attempt was made to employ sound scholarly practices, the author recognizes that interpretation of research results was influenced by her worldview, perceptions, and biases. We are all cultural beings and our attitudes and beliefs impact upon our perceptions and interpretations (American Psychological Association, 2002; Arthur & Collins, 2005; Gone, 2004; Sue & Sue, 1990).
The second limitation inherent in this project concerns the fact that First Nations people are a diverse population whose beliefs, values, and worldviews vary due to individual differences in contextual and experiential variables. Each person has experiences unlike no other. These experiences contribute to an individual’s sense of cultural identity. Therefore, counsellors must avoid assuming that people who identify with a particular cultural group have homogeneous experiences, values, or beliefs (Arthur & Stewart, 2001). Cultural knowledge about certain groups is, at best, tentative in its relevancy to individuals. Consequently, the manual can serve only as a guide for counsellors and must be applied in consultation with First Nations communities.

Researching the utility of the manual in enhancing counselling services for First Nations people would be a step towards addressing the limitations of the project. For example, a future research project might compare counsellor competencies in culture-infused counselling before and after integrating the ideas in the manual. First Nations clientele might then be solicited for feedback regarding satisfaction with services. Furthermore, exploring how cultural identity or other counsellor characteristics influences the receptiveness to the ideas in the manual would provide additional insight into the nature of the manual’s utility.

Finally, introducing the manual to counsellors who identify themselves as belonging to a First Nations cultural group for the purpose of seeking feedback would enhance the credibility of the manual. The manual could then be revised and would reflect not only scholarly work but a First Nations perspective on culturally respectful counselling. Ideally, a section on divergent beliefs and customs among First Nations bands would eventually be added to the manual for counsellors serving specific First
Nations communities. However, users of the manual would need to keep in mind intragroup heterogeneity.

Canadian counsellors are now cognizant of the diverse cultures within our country. Moreover, the counselling profession’s codes of ethics guide counsellors to be sensitive and responsive towards this diversity. To this end, further research and applied practices that facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the needs of First Nations clients within a counselling context will assist counsellors in their endeavours to integrate culturally appropriate methods into current counselling practices.
References


Workers' Handbook. Retrieved September 8, 2005, from
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/supportwork/

Morrissette, P. J. (1994). The holocaust of First Nation people: residual effects on
parenting and treatment implications. Contemporary Family Therapy, 16, 381 –
392.

community holistic circle healing process (RC023218). Ottawa, ON: Aboriginal
People’s Collection. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 459 018)

BC: Author. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED462638)

Canadian Journal of Counselling, 37(3), 186 – 196.

Psychology, 6, 221 – 231.

ethical decision-making in emerging areas of practice. Canadian Psychology, 39,
231 – 238.

Pettifor, J. (2001). Are professional codes of ethics relevant for multi-cultural

Pinderhughes, E. (1989). Understanding race, ethnicity, and power: The key to efficacy in


