CULTURAL COMPETENCY, CHILD PROTECTION INTAKE WORKERS, AND NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA EXPERIENCES

by

Anthony Muturi Kariuki

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Abstract

Cultural and ethnic diversity as a principle feature in Canadian child protection services necessitates drastic continuous reviews of existing organization policies and frameworks. A case in point is the need to address the persistent disproportional representation of ethnic minority children in the British Columbia’s provincial child welfare system. As the initial contact with families in the province, child protection intake social workers’ cultural competency largely determines the effectiveness of the services provided to families. This qualitative study used content analysis to analyze interviews with six child protection social workers employed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). A thematic framework was developed that can be used to inform MCFD regarding the need for improvement of cultural competency among its workers.
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Finally, I wish to express my love and gratitude to my wife Florence Wanjeri Muturi and our daughters Ivy Wanjeri and Ida Wanjiku, who so lovingly supported and motivated me during this process.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Veronica Wanjiru Kariuki and the late Charles Kariuki Muturi, who raised me. I cherish and always remember their words of wisdom, unwavering support and commitment to family values.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study delves into child protection intake workers’ cultural competency, in their work with people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. While considering this topic, my initial thoughts included questions around three areas: 1) how well informed intake social workers are on the cultural realities of vulnerable families, 2) the different perceptions of risk and vulnerability between intake social workers and the families they are involved with, and 3) social workers’ and clients’ awareness and perception of values, norms, and legal implications related to child protection interventions. In the opening chapter, the purpose and goals of this research will be outlined, followed by the research question. Subsequently, a number of significant terms that will feature in the study will be defined, as well as a brief account of my “place within the study.” The literature review will form the second chapter, which will detail past and current information related to this study. Chapter three will include the research methodology, and methods that have been applied in this study. The research findings will form the fourth chapter, followed by the conclusion in the fifth and final chapter.

In this qualitative research study, I interviewed six child protection intake social workers from different parts of northern British Columbia, using open-ended questions that were carefully prepared. The nature of the questions took into consideration the sensitivity of the topic to ensure that interviewees could as much as possible provide uninhibited responses. The questions were aimed at gathering information that would establish how well Northern intake social workers measure up to some of the common characteristics found in already established models, and frameworks of cultural competency. McPhatter’s (1997) Cultural Competency Attainment Model is a good example that comprises enlightened...
consciousness, grounded knowledge base; and cumulative skill proficiency. Once the data were collected, a content analysis methodological approach was utilized to identify themes from the interviews, with the hope of developing a unique cultural competency framework for Northern child protection social work practice.

**Research Question, Purpose, and Goals**

My research question is: How culturally competent are the child protection intake workers in Northern British Columbia? The purpose of this cultural competency study is to contribute to the creation of new or additional culturally appropriate policy guidelines for current and future child protection workers in Northern British Columbia. The goal of this study is to explore the level of cultural awareness among child protection intake social workers, and use the information for the possibility of developing a more culturally appropriate professional practice. Also, it is hoped that, by providing them with this research opportunity, the participants (child protection social workers) will find themselves empowered as contributors to the knowledge that will be derived from the research project.

**Theoretical Framework**

The context of this study is firmly grounded in critical theory, including critical race theory and anti-oppressive theory. My preference for critical theory is based on my desire as a critical social work practitioner to further advance the discourse on alleviating human suffering that stems from domination and oppression. According to Mullaly (1997), critical theory provides criticism, alternatives to traditional mainstream social theory and science, and is motivated by an interest to emancipate those who are oppressed. Critical theory can be traced back to Karl Marx who is arguably its founder. The theory was later advanced by Western European theorists including Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert...
Marcuse, all of whom were from the renowned Frankfurt School in Germany. The latter's original basic idea of critical theory was that, "since a person cannot be free from that about which they are ignorant, liberation depends in the first instance on recognition of that which imprisons the human mind or dominates the human person" (Sabia & Wallulis, 1983, p. 131).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that, "Knowledge does not accumulate in an absolute sense; rather, it grows and changes through a dialectical process of historical revision that continuously erodes ignorance and misapprehensions and enlarges more informed insights" (p. 114). Critical theorists argue that reality is produced through historically-based social and political processes, the social circumstances are understood to be reflections of a deeply entrenched structure that serves the purposes of the powerful (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). On the other hand, the people who are marginalized in these structures are led to believe that existing social arrangements are natural and indisputable. But I believe that true knowledge lies in exposing the relations of domination that create this fundamental reality. Therefore, dealing with cultural issues calls for engagement with historical, political, and economic structures that have contributed to formulations of ethnic identity, group status, and opportunities for individuals (Husband, 2000, Latting & Zundel, 1986).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), critical race theory's mission is to analyze, deconstruct, and transform, for the better, the relationship of race, racism, and power. Importantly, there is acknowledgement by critical race theorists of the overlapping of various oppressions such as the marginalized, poor, and racial minorities which underscores its conformity with social work practice (Razack & Jeffery, 2002). They argue that social work and critical race theory are highly compatible, and that diverse cultural competence...
training without a rigorous race analysis provides students with a less than adequate perspective or tools to locate and act on exclusionary and oppressive social practices.

Anti-oppressive theory, on the other hand, seeks to empower and raise consciousness among both the oppressed and individuals who choose to work with those who face various forms of oppression (Mullaly, 1997). To uphold individual and group rights to live in a society devoid of various forms of oppression calls for concerted efforts, one of which is ensuring that cultural competency training is provided to those who provide various forms of services. Critical cultural competence work with individuals, families, and groups requires the ability to conceptualize how pervasive inequity affects presenting problems, and the capacity to seek help and gain access to services (Singleton-Bowie, 1995).

However, it is problematic to focus exclusively on deficits and disadvantages associated with marginalization. This view must be balanced with the ability to replace centering on deficits with centering on strengths associated with membership in racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and other groups (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1999). Williams (2006) urges social workers to challenge institutions to increase participation and decision making by marginalized groups, and to respond more effectively to the needs of wider segments of society. The latter asserts that cultural competence is determined by the ability to foster positive cultural identity, empower individuals and groups to negotiate oppressive social structures, and to promote social change by altering institutional processes that contribute to marginalization.
**Definition of Common Terminologies**

The following terminologies and their respective definitions feature prominently in this study: culture, cultural competency, competency, Child Protection Social Workers, and Northern British Columbia.

**Culture**

Culture refers to the concepts, habits, skills, art, instruments, and institutions of a given people in a given period (Webster's Dictionary, 1979, p 44). Along similar lines, culture, according to Tylor (1958) is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by humans as members of society. Another description, according to Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989, as cited in Lie & Este, 1999), contends that “culture implies the integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, and values as well as, institutions of racial, ethnic, religious or social groups” (p 30). For the purpose of this study, I have chosen Turner's (2005) Canadian usage definition which states “culture refers to the patterns of customs, values, behaviours, and traditions found in an identifiable group of persons that are formed or shaped by their identification with a particular geographic location” (p 92).

**Cultural Competency**

“Cultural competency embraces the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs” (Cross et al, 1989, p 13). Due to numerous conceptual definitions of cultural
competency and other related constructs, such as cross-cultural competency and ethnic sensitive practice, cultural competency for the purpose of this research will refer to

The process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, race, ethnic backgrounds, religious, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each (National Association of Social Workers, NASW, 2001)

**Competency**

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (2001) describes competency as the capacity to function effectively within the context of integrated patterns of human behaviour defined by a group McPhatter (1997) defines competency as an ability or capacity equal to the requirement that is, responding effectively to the purpose of the goal I have chosen for the purpose of this study Green (1995), definition of competence which points to the ability by a professional to conduct their work in a way that is congruent with the behaviour and expectations that members of a distinctive culture recognize as appropriate among themselves

**Child Protection Intake Workers**

Child protection intake workers serve two main purposes 1) providing safety and protection for children at risk of maltreatment by caregiver(s), and 2) helping families alter the conditions which contribute to risk of maltreatment (DePanfilis, 1988) Child protection work, therefore, includes providing front-line social work services to children and their families by assessing complaints about children alleged to be in need of protection as defined by the Child, Family and Community Services Act of British Columbia, 1996 Intake workers are the first point of contact in investigating child protection concerns, and to assess the immediate safety of children. The worker investigates the child protection concerns in
accordance with the legal provisions of their jurisdiction. For example, Child and Family
Services Acts are used in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. The intake workers
determine whether the concerns are verified, not verified, or inconclusive, whether the child
requires ongoing protection services, or whether the file can be closed. The worker is
required to approach all work with families from a strength-based culturally-appropriate
manner, engaging families in the process of determining their strengths, needs, and
establishing service plan goals (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2008/2009
Service Plan).

Northern British Columbia

In this research study, some characteristics of the uniqueness of Canada’s North will
emerge. Zapf (1993) observed that, unlike the United States and Europe’s northern regions,
Canada’s North may not be captured within the conventional notion of rurality, since most of
its region is not a rural agricultural setting but a vast wilderness. Canada is mostly wilderness
compared to the United States, which is only 2 percent wilderness. The Canadian population
is therefore concentrated along the southern belt, neighbouring the United States (Stringer, as
cited in Zapf, 1993). Nine out of ten Canadians live within 200 miles of the United States
border in the urban corridor between Quebec City and Windsor, Ontario (Beaujot &
McQuillan, 1982). The remaining one out of ten live in the vast northern region of Canada,
which includes Northern British Columbia.

The geographical nature of the North can pose significant challenges for social
workers that are different from those encountered by their urban counterparts in the south.
Northern remote Canada is characterized by a severe winter climate, sparse population, and
richness in natural resources. Due to increased economic and social activities in northern
Canada, there has been a growing influx of professionals from various disciplines. There is also considerable evidence to support the notion that rural and remote practice like that found in Northern British Columbia constitutes a different and distinct practice (Zapf, 1993). No wonder the environmental challenges that face those who choose to work in northern remote regions of Canada have attracted significant attention in the recent past (Schmidt & Klein, 2004). As an example, child protection social workers in the northern environment are subject to a high turnover, thereby affecting the provision of social services to some northern communities. Schmidt (2000) observes that the northern region “can be described as a place or a sense of a place which is defined economically, culturally, and geographically, with a leaning towards the idea of marginalization, cast within a framework of isolation, and remoteness” (p. 339).

**Placing Myself within the Study**

This research study focuses on cultural competency in Northern British Columbia’s child protection social work practice. My interest in this topic emanates from experiences in my work as a child protection social worker. My passion for the topic is driven by the following two factors. First and foremost, as a practicing northern social worker, I have gained substantial experience in the challenges and rewards of working and living in the north, some of which are highlighted in this study. Secondly, as a member of a visible minority ethnic group, my experiences of living, studying, and working as a social worker in the North for over eight years have broadened my cultural awareness and instilled in me a passion for cultural studies.

My choice of the above topic emanates not only from experiences as a child protection social worker but also from my background as a member of an ethnic minority.
My upbringing and early life in Kenya presents "cultural baggage," some of which has been difficult to adapt to or maintain while living in northern British Columbia. An example of an aspect of cultural baggage that still haunts me is the persistent urge of trying to maintain some of the values that I grew up with. A good example was the expectation during my upbringing that children were expected to follow rules or directions without questioning, since parents know what is best for their child. While raising my own children as well as working with families (clients), I have kept most of my values, and learned and adapted to some alternative values by being aware of my cultural baggage as much as possible. In the course of my work, I have experienced several culturally sensitive challenges that have sometimes led to poor or even lack of collaboration with clients. In addition, belonging to a visible minority ethnic group and being a male social worker in a predominantly female-dominated career puts me in a very unique situation. I have had to constantly educate myself not only about the mainstream Canadian popular culture, but also about multicultural issues.

Four of the most common culturally related challenges I still continue to encounter are related to:

1) Difficulties in rapport building due to distrust resulting from historical stigma of client involvement with child protection agencies, especially with those of Aboriginal origin.

2) Female clients questioning whether I have sufficient knowledge of their world to be of assistance.

3) Language and other communication barriers.
4) Apparent doubt by some clients, whose questions or statements point to doubts as to whether I have the professional expertise or mastery to address problems experienced by cross-racial clients.

Rapport building is one of the most crucial stages for social workers when engaging with a new client. In my experience, I have had to work with support workers of Aboriginal ancestry or police in order to develop a rapport or to assess the safety of children, especially among the Aboriginal families. There appears to be persistent distrust of child protection agencies among the Aboriginal population due to historical issues of racism. Although I have eventually been able to develop rapport, for the most part, I have had to sometimes prove my sincerity by practicing beyond my personal comfort. For example, one of my clients, who was facing various challenges including drug addiction, sometimes insisted that he was having difficulties understanding me, especially when I had to investigate protection reports related to his parenting. Yet the same client did not have a problem when we had regular planning meetings.

Working with female clients has also been a challenge due to either ethno-cultural norms or gender issues. One of my memorable encounters involved a Muslim woman client who could not allow me into her apartment because it was against her culture to be with another man in the residence in the absence of her husband. The client could not even open her apartment door, although she did explain that I could see her face in the presence of her husband. Interacting with some female clients has also been a challenge, especially those who have been vulnerable to various kinds of male exploitation. Also, mothers appear to doubt my experience with children, as they sometimes ask me whether I have children.
I have also experienced various language and other communications challenges. Language barriers have mainly been related to impatience between some clients and myself because of difficulties understanding each other due to our respective English accents. Other clients are eager to know my country of origin, and for how long I have lived in Canada, while either trying to gauge my experience or just being curious of my origin.

One of the most interesting experiences related to communication has come up several times during child protection investigations involving my colleagues. It is against the law in Canada to use corporal punishment while disciplining a child with the exception of using an open hand spanking (Section 43, Canada Criminal Code). To the contrary, some cultures, including my own, have no language distinction between the act of hitting and beating. Therefore, when a child from an immigrant family is disciplined by either hitting or spanking, they are more likely to use the word “beat” when describing the incidents to teachers and caregivers. The word “beat” in mainstream Canadian culture raises the seriousness of the incident and some social workers have had to request a police escort when attending to the child’s home for investigation. On several occasions, I have had to explain the meaning of the word “beat” to my colleagues, some of whom have found the realization helpful in subsequent encounters with other clients of different ethnic culture. While discussing the above issues with my workmates, I have realized that most of my challenges and many others are not unique to me, hence, my interest in conducting this research study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Setting the Stage

As the growing prominence of cultural competency continues to exact pressure on human services to sensitize professionals to change or improve their practice, there is need for more research and training in the area of child welfare. The research carried out over the last three decades has dealt mostly with cultural competency and ethnicity as they pertain to minorities and people of colour. But it appears to have done much less to enlighten social workers from dominant white populations on the importance of acknowledging the essence of ethnicity and cultural knowledge. Over-representation of children of minority populations in both Canada and the United States necessitates more sensitization of professionals, many of whom are from the dominant population and may be unaware of the true realities of the children and families whom they serve.

The perspective of the dominant culture often guides child welfare practitioners who lack an understanding of what is normative or appropriate behavior in different cultures. When culture is not factored in the worker’s practice, it is highly unlikely that the practitioner will be inclined to identify and utilize the strengths of diverse families and communities. Assessment would therefore be skewed toward problems rather than strengths (Este, 2003, p. 406, in Kufeldt & McKenzie, 2003).

Unlike classic social work, child protection work is unique because of the legal implications which guide decision making. Social work in general is built upon a client’s willingness to participate in the therapeutic process or, rather, a voluntary acceptance of social work services (DePanfilis, 1988). However, child protection social workers have to operate differently. For example, if a parent declines services or refuses to cooperate, and client participation is unlikely to be obtained through typical social work methods, the social worker must decide whether to impose services, depending on the existing or anticipated
danger to the child. Child protection social workers may impose services such as alcohol and drug treatment to parents against their will, where failure to comply may result in the child being removed from the parent’s custody, in accordance with the law (CFCS Act). Child protection workers who initially engage families, commonly referred to as Intake workers, sometimes find themselves in precarious positions when they have to deal with distressed, uncooperative, or hostile parents resistant to the social workers’ intervention, for one reason or another. Dealing with such contentious child protection situations calls for timely judgment informed by an understanding of the dynamics of the situation. Cultural competency can be helpful to child protection social workers mainly because of the vagueness of some the child protection laws. For example, the need for protection “if a child is likely to be or is emotionally harmed by a parents’ conduct” (CFCS Act, p 26).

Culture sets the stage for certain factors that may play a role in child abuse and neglect. For example, cultural attitudes and values about discipline are often reflected in the child-rearing practices of the family involved. It is therefore important in child protection social work to consider the basis for these practices and to distinguish between 1) client behaviour that is related to cultural practice and which is related to individual maladjustment, and 2) practices and characteristics that are the result of economic deprivation rather than culture specific. A distinction in these areas should provide a framework within which to evaluate culturally diverse families, and enhance case decision making (DePanfilis, 1988).

Even with the force of law behind them, child protection workers are required, as much as possible, to use the least intrusive measures when dealing with child protection cases. It would therefore make it much easier for child protection social workers to reach clearer and quicker decisions if they are well versed with, 1) the client’s cultural realities, and
2) the awareness of how their own cultural background may affect interaction with clients

Adequate cultural competency can be of much help to child protection intake workers given the numerous dilemmas in their work.

Also, social workers should endeavour to ascertain that the families they serve are aware of some of the legal implications pertaining to child protection services. Child protection services and law enforcement agencies should therefore jointly ensure that the general Canadian population and/or recent immigrant population are served in a culturally appropriate manner. According to (Pence & Wilson, as cited in Dubowitz & DePanfilis, 2000), in order to provide appropriate services, coordination between child protective services and law enforcement is important during assessments and investigations of child protection cases. Child protection and law enforcement in both the United States and Canada have different missions, and the authors explain that, whereas child protection is focused on reducing the risk to the child, law enforcement is focused more on holding those who break the law accountable for their actions. The capacity to effectively address some child protection cases by both agencies to a larger extent depends on the workers' ability to engage and interact with people of diverse personal and/or ethnic cultures. Also, established protocols and operation agreements help to maintain good working relationships between child protection workers and law enforcement. However, the issue of confidentiality remains the biggest perceived challenge but with cooperation and trust, collaboration between the two agencies can be achieved. Hence, of paramount importance is that

These systems' responses must be augmented by the efforts of individual protective service workers. Individuals must reach out to their colleagues in law enforcement and prosecution and build social relationships, personal familiarity, and trust, share professional information from the literature and training, and help the relationship
move from one between agencies to one of trust between individuals (Pence & Wilson, as cited in Dubowitz & DePanfilis, 2000, p 104)

According to Ronnau (1994), the starting point for social workers who aspire to become culturally competent is to become aware of their own culture. Culturally sensitive individuals must be cognizant of how their own backgrounds may affect interactions with clients from other backgrounds. In addition, various writers contend that social workers need to be reasonably knowledgeable about other cultures as well (Dungee-Anderson & Beckett; 1995, Moore, 1994, Neukrug, 1994, Ronnau, 1994)

In addition, cultural competency requires continuous effort to gain more knowledge about the client’s culture (Ronnau, 1994). The author adds that the quest for this knowledge is an ongoing process, and it is unrealistic to expect workers to have a comprehensive knowledge of all cultures. It is through interacting more with clients and other practitioners that social workers get opportunities to learn more about diverse cultural backgrounds.

Jeff (1994) and Moore (1994) contend that it is important for social workers to be knowledgeable of the world views possessed by clients as an ongoing process. In other words, a “culturally skilled [individual] actively attempts to understand the world view of her (his) culturally different client without negative judgment” (Moore, 1994, p 34). The author asserts that culturally sensitive professionals need to understand how behaviours such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and ageism impact on individuals. To emphasize the universal importance of cultural awareness, Edwards (1994) argues that

Racism victimizes the dominant culture by obliterating any distinction or glory to its heritage, in an effort to define difference as negative and undesirable and its own ways as standard. Consequently the pride of identifying with a culture of one’s own is lost (p 51)
The Moral Vision Imperative

The essence of cultural awareness in human service has been largely discussed and researched in many different ways, but “moral vision” stands out as a progressive, strength-based approach that captures the fundamental explanation of culture. In his counselling theory literature, most of which is applicable to child welfare practice, Christopher (1996) proposes that counsellors should be cognizant of their own moral visions as well as those of clients as they embark on developing rapport. According to Christopher (1994) and Christopher and Powers (1996), “moral visions are constellations of cultural values and assumptions that shape our experiences in life, and the stances we adopt toward it” (p 4). Working with individuals from various cultures exposes the child protection workers to different moral visions, and they must simultaneously be cognizant of their own moral vision. However, in child protection, a field that is sometimes characterized by a rapid succession of events, the worker may not have enough time to establish the client’s moral vision when taking necessary drastic action in the best interest of a child. The worker may therefore initially only depend on his or her basic knowledge of the client’s culture. It is, however, imperative that, after ensuring the immediate safety of the child, a timely follow-up to establish the moral vision of the client is undertaken, to ensure a clear understanding of the genesis of the child protection concern. Moral vision provides an explanation of one of the most fundamental aspects of culture, “values.” The following example and a subsequent explanation is an excerpt from Christopher (1996). The author gives the example of Joe, a young Chamoru man, who had been referred to him, who fit the diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. Joe had an extensive history of fighting and assault and came from a family with a reputation for being fierce fighters. Although slender and of modest build, Joe took great pride in the fact that he had never lost any of the many fights in which he had engaged. It was a point of pride that he had never walked
away from a confrontation even when, as he put it, looking down the barrel of a gun. Apparently, Joe had developed an infamous reputation among a certain population for his fighting abilities. As a result of these fighting abilities and his willingness to never back down, the young man, along with several other boys who had demonstrated fighting abilities became “protector” of his village. Notably, Joe was considerably younger than most of the boys but was accepted as an equal because of his fighting accomplishments. Indeed he was something of a celebrity. (Christopher, 1996, p 9)

Christopher (1996) explains that if the case of Joe is viewed in terms of psychopathology alone, the moral element is lost. Joe appears to have constructed his life and his identity around a particular moral vision. The vision goes something like this:

Honor or dignity comes from being unafraid, and it is better to be physically injured than to acknowledge fear. Respect and admiration come from proficiency at fighting, the willingness to put oneself on the line, and the ability to stifle fear. Moreover, this moral stance helped to perpetuate the family reputation. Now, although many of us would find this outlook on life troubling, it does not reveal the total absence of moral and ethical consideration that is stereotypically associated with antisocial personalities. Joe has a moral vision that expresses deeper qualitative distinctions, distinctions of worth. It paints a portrait of the good life and the good ‘man’; it is this ‘moral’ element that makes his lifestyle compelling to him. It is his deepest, albeit implicit, motivation. (Christopher, 1996, p 10)

The author concludes that, although there may be distortions or problems with an individual’s particular moral vision, it still remains an important moral source that we would affirm as worthy and admirable. Additionally, the author denotes that one advantage of the moral vision approach is that we do not discredit and discount the whole person based on only one value.

**Cultural Competency: A Brief Historical Review**

The following is a brief history of pioneering work by cultural competency scholars. This account will include the work of scholars in Canada and United States, some of whom have written extensively on the plight of minorities and people of colour. In an attempt to address insensitivity and poor service to minorities, the pioneers of cultural competency work
since the early 1980s sought to embark on universal concepts that would cut across ethnic lines to address common issues, such as racism, facing minority groups (Gallegos, 1982). The work of pioneers such as Devore and Schlesinger (1981), Green (1982), Gallegos (1982), and Pederson and Marsell (1982) laid the groundwork for strategies that still apply to cultural competency education and policy frameworks.

In their groundbreaking work, *Ethnic Sensitive Social Work Practice*, Devore and Schlesinger (1981) wrote the first book that formed a preliminary introduction to ethnic and culturally-sensitive social work practice. The authors’ framework on ethnic sensitive social work practice included the following three principles:

1. Understanding the ethnic community means that a social worker should be familiar with population characteristics.


3. Understanding of non-conscious phenomena, particularly culture, routines and disposition towards life.

The publication by Devore and Schlesinger, (1981) was followed in 1982 by a group effort of the University of Washington social work faculty, which resulted in Green’s (1982) book *Cultural Awareness in the Human Services*. Green came up with the “help seeking behaviour model,” adapted from an earlier model from the medical field called “health seeking behaviour,” by Kleinman (1973), as quoted in Green (p. 29). The tenets of the model included 1) the client’s recognition of an experience as a “problem,” 2) the client’s use of language to label and categorize a problem, 3) the availability of indigenous helping resources in client communities and the decision making involved in the utilization of those resources.
resources; and 4) client-oriented criteria for determining that a satisfactory resolution has been achieved. It is noteworthy that the pioneers of cultural competency put much emphasis on the relevance of personality and behavioural deficit in ethno-cultural studies.

Green (1982) also broadly outlined the need for delivery of a culturally relevant service that would result from a work force trained through a relevant culturally appropriate curriculum. While acknowledging the importance of social work’s ‘helping skill,” such as rapport, empathy, warmth, and genuineness, the author noted that, first, such skills may not be uniformly applicable to most clients and, secondly, refining such skills may not be sufficient when working with some minority groups (Green, 1982) The author therefore proposed the need for training experiences that can be adapted to a variety of cross-cultural situations and by which means the learner can acquire the relevant knowledge for working successfully with minority group clients To illustrate the complexity of cultural competency training Green observed that

A child learns the patterns and pieces of a culture as they are presented, somewhat randomly and over a long period of time A monocultural adult entering an unfamiliar social world is forced to learn the same way Events and objects appear which are strange at first, then recede into the background as their places in a culture context become familiar and are taken for granted The adult’s advantage over a child is the capacity for critical assessment of the pieces as they are presented The disadvantage is that learned prejudices act as blinders to much that is going on (1982, p. 51)

Subsequent work on cultural competency by other scholars continues to emphasize continuous self awareness assessments for professionals, aimed at cultural biases that may arise One of the earliest framework proposals for acquiring knowledge about other cultures emphasized cognition and affective expression (Green, 1982) By cognition, the author means that practitioners must learn what members of a particular culture know, i.e., their beliefs about history, values, ideology, and, particularly, their world view With the term
"affective expression," the author meant that one can know about things and respond to feelings of the members of an ethnic group. Green, concluded that "until one can act appropriately and have the act recognized by others as culturally genuine, the broadened understanding that comes from having moved in two cultures is never really achieved" (1982, p 52)

Another scholar, Gallegos (1982), developed further the groundbreaking work initiated by Devore and Schlesinger (1981) and Green (1982), by introducing a framework for preparing child welfare workers for ethnic-sensitive social work practice. Gallegos' (1982) training framework had three main components: ethnicity and culture, ethnic competence, and translating training models to practice. The authors, who were affiliated with the National Association of Social Workers in the United States, argued that the rationale for their work was — if social services are to be extended equally to all, appropriate competencies for practice must be established. The authors made the following recommendations:

1. Agencies and programs must be committed to the implementation of cross-cultural training and practice. The commitment must include time, staff, and money.
2. Cross-cultural training cannot occur without an opportunity to interact with ethnic minority individuals, such as resource persons or agencies. Further, the interaction should not be on a crisis only basis but should be on an ongoing reciprocal relationship.
3. Cross-cultural training requires extensive follow-up and is a lengthy process.
4. For practitioners, the translation of personal attributes, knowledge and skills, must be reflected in practice. (Day et al., as cited in NASW, 1984, p 61)
While the pioneering work above was mainly centered on service to minority groups within North America, the 1990s decade saw an increase in discussions that included immigrant groups. The changing demographic face in both Canada and the United States has culminated in a more inclusive and dynamic approach to the cultural competency discourse (McPhatter, 1997).

In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, scholars who embarked on further research on cultural competency appear to have shifted their effort more towards promoting conceptual models for use by professionals and organizations (Cross et al., 1989, Leung, Cheung, & Stevenson, 1994, McPhatter, 1997, McPhatter & Ganaway, 2003, and Orlandi, 1992, as cited in Este, 1999), and developed some of the most reviewed conceptual models which are explained below.

**Frameworks and Models**

A) *Cultural Competence Continuum* (Cross et al., 1989) One of the earliest and most reviewed cultural competency frameworks was developed by Cross et al. of the United States. The authors described cultural competence as a developmental process that evolves over an extended period and one in which individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along the cultural competence continuum. The pioneering framework has widely been applied in healthcare and psychosocial services.
Cross et al (1989) described the above stages as follows:

- Cultural destructiveness acknowledges only one way of being and purposefully denies or outlaws any other cultural approaches.
- Cultural incapacity supports the concept of separate but equal, marked by an inability to deal personally with multiple approaches but a willingness to accept their existence elsewhere.
• Cultural blindness fosters an assumption that people are all basically alike, so what works with members of one culture should work within all other cultures.

• Cultural pre-competence encourages learning and understanding of new ideas and solutions to improve performance or services.

• Cultural competence involves actively seeking advice and consultation and a commitment to incorporating new knowledge and experiences into a wider range of practice.

• Cultural proficiency involves holding cultural differences and diversity in the highest esteem, pro-activity regarding cultural differences and promotion of improved cultural relations among diverse groups (Cross et al, 1989).

B) Cultural Competence Attainment Model

Although this model is based on McPhatter’s (1997) experiences with African Americans in the United States, it appears highly applicable to Canadian Aboriginal experiences. The model’s assumption is that healthcare and psychosocial services for children and families should be culturally acceptable and supportive of the integrity and strengths of the client’s culture. McPhatter (1997) asserts that “Child welfare practitioners have an obligation to provide culturally congruent interventions if they are to achieve, in actuality, the goal of preserving the best interest of children, family and communities” (p. 257).

According to McPhatter (1997), the cultural competence attainment model has three components: grounded knowledge base (p 265), which involves the creative use of a wide range of sources of information including other disciplines, related subject matter, and non-mainstream works), enlightened consciousness (p 262), which involves a fundamental
process of reorienting one's primary world view), and cumulative skill proficiency (p. 271)

Enlightened consciousness and grounded knowledge base are the bricks and cement that build cumulative skill proficiency, whereas cumulative connotes the process nature of skill development (McPhatter, 1997)

In keeping with the competence attainment model by McPhatter (1997), the starting point for social workers who aspire to become culturally competent is to become aware of their own cultures. The author describes the process as one that “requires a radical restructuring of a well entrenched belief system that perceives oneself and one's culture, including values, and ways of behaviour, as not only preferred but clearly superior to others” (p. 262) It is particularly difficult for new social workers who have grown up in environments in which most of the people with whom they interact are racially, ethnically, and culturally alike. The author observes that the essential transformation begins with a shifting of consciousness and awareness of our narrow socialization. Culturally sensitive individuals must be cognizant of how their own cultural background may affect interactions with clients from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds. By interacting more with clients and other practitioners, social workers are exposed to opportunities that help them learn more about other cultures. McPhatter (1997, p. 263) refers to this as “enlightened consciousness”

Secondly, McPhatter (1997) addresses the importance of a “grounded knowledge base,” founded on the acquisition of formal education. The author addresses the formal education foundation, which she describes as biased in favour of the Eurocentric world view, with an example of the highly questionable if not flawed education foundation which purports that science is neutral and devoid of bias. Conversely, the author points out that history, mythology, values, culture, and scientific methodology all shape the basic essence of
knowledge building McPhatter (1997) therefore asserts that a grounded knowledge base should begin with the premise that everything must be exposed to a process of critical analysis, and that the theory and practice wisdom that forms the basis of social work practice demands considerable and ongoing critique. Also, during this stage, social workers acquire knowledge and history of their own and other peoples’ culture.

Moore (1994, p 34) asserts “culturally skilled workers actively attempt to understand the world views of their culturally different client without negative judgment” which leads to the third component of the above model. According to McPhatter (1997 p 271) “Cumulative skill proficiency” acts as cement for the above two components, emphasizing the ability by social workers to engage culturally different clients’ realities in an accepting, genuine, and non-offensive manner. The author concludes that the acquisition of cultural competency skills can only be possible through a consistent practice driven by a bona fide goal to be real with others.
Figure 2. Cultural Competence Attainment Model

Adapted from McPhatter (1997)

C) The continuum of cultural literacy is a cultural competency framework that describes the developmental process by which social workers become culturally competent. Unlike Cross et al.’s (1989) framework (Cultural Competence Continuum), Orlandi’s framework has three main stages: cultural incompetence, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competence.

1 Cultural incompetence is the stage or phase where social workers are unaware or do not possess the desire or willingness to become culturally competent. This stage can be very destructive since a social worker may not give consideration to the impact cultural factors may have on a client. A social worker in this stage is likely to
approach client cases with the same mind set when dealing with diverse communities which may lead to gross ineffectiveness

2 In the second stage is cultural sensitivity: in which social workers are aware of the fine distinctions of their own and others’ culture They have some skills in relation to cultural competency and are likely to be receptive to gaining more knowledge about different outcomes

3 The final stage of becoming culturally competent occurs when social workers understand the values, norms, and customs of diverse communities and possess the skills required in a culturally competent manner Practicing at this level represents the ideal that workers should attempt to achieve (Orlandi, as cited in Este, 1999, p 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Cultural Incompetence</th>
<th>Cultural Sensitivity</th>
<th>Cultural Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dimension</td>
<td>Oblivious</td>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Dimension</td>
<td>Apathetic</td>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Committed to Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills Dimension</td>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>Lacking Some Skills</td>
<td>Highly Skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Effect</td>
<td>Destructive</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Constructive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Orlandi (1992)

D) *The Strengths Approach to Ethnically Sensitive Practice* for child protective service workers, by Leung, Cheung, and Stevenson (1994), is the authors’ extension of their
The authors address the family preservation principles and the strength-perspectives approaches to ethnically sensitive child protection services. According to the latter, the Family Preservation Perspective includes the movement towards permanency planning, by keeping the children within their families or, if necessary, with adoptive families, which replaced past policies of motivation to rescue children. On the other hand, the strength perspective, according to Saleeby (1986), rests on the assumptions that:

1) Despite life’s problems, all people and environments possess strengths that can be marshaled to improve the quality of the client’s lives. Therefore, practitioners should respect these strengths and the direction in which clients wish to apply them.

2) Client motivation is fostered by a consistent emphasis on strengths as the clients define them.

3) Discovering strengths requires a process of cooperative exploration between clients and workers.

4) Focusing on strengths turns the practitioner’s attention away from the temptation to “blame the victim” toward discovering how clients managed to survive even in inhospitable circumstances.

5) All environments — even the most bleak — contain resources.

According to Leung, Cheung, and Stevenson (1994), a systematic way of identifying and utilizing the ability, talent, potential, and resources of client systems in casework helps and empowers clients to recognize their competence and strengths in the course of intervention. Components of the strength approach include: 1) developing positive attitudes towards clients, 2) focusing on family strengths but not problems, 3) encouraging clients to
engage in effective behaviours, 4) challenging clients to appreciate their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds; and 5) encouraging clients to locate their own resources. The authors emphasize that the appreciation of difference is key to ethnically sensitive practice, an attitude which forms the basis of the strength approach in child protection services.

If we are to respond effectively to the needs of the multicultural children and families we serve, we must value diversity, understand and respect their cultures, and plan and provide culturally relevant programs and services. To do so, we first must recognize that culture is an important determinant of who we are; to provide meaningful and effective child welfare services, we will need to gain knowledge of and appreciation for the ethnicity and culture of our clients (CWLA 1993, V, as cited in Leung, Cheung, & Stevenson, 1994)

In addition to the five strength approach components, Leung, Cheung, and Stevenson (1994) also propose six guiding values for family preservation service with a strength perspective, which include: 1) children should grow up within their own families, 2) people can change, 3) clients can be regarded as colleagues, 4) instilling hope is a significant part of child protection services' job, 5) people can do their best when empowered, and 6) child protection social workers need support. It is evident from these six values that the movement is more from a deficit- to a growth-oriented understanding between child protection social workers and families.

Finally, commitment, knowledge, and the ability to work with ethnically diverse clients require that child protection service workers adhere to five steps: 1) awareness of attitudes toward differences, 2) articulation of such attitudes, 3) critique of values and assumptions, 4) assessment of emotional barriers, and 5) appropriate expression of attitudes in behaviour (Jones et al., in press, as cited in Leung, Cheung, & Stevenson, 1994, p. 710).

The following table by Leung, Cheung, & Stevenson (1994) describes the systematic approach to Ethnically Sensitive Practice.
### Table 2. A Systematic Approach to Ethnically Sensitive Practice

**PARTICIPANTS**

I: Client System / II: CPS Worker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASES</th>
<th>TRAINING AND EVALUATION AREAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Contact</strong></td>
<td><strong>A: Attitudes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Toward differences, authority, disciplines,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>confidentiality, time, and personal space</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B: Knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ethically defined roles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Context of respect</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dress, food, greeting styles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>C: Skills</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use appropriate greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explain roles and reasons for interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Apply effective communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Problem Identification and Data Collection</strong></td>
<td><strong>A: Attitudes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Toward changing ethnically bound expectations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Different perspectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Overassumptions of permssiveness in a given ethnic group</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>B: Knowledge</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ethnic definitions of the problem</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ethnically defined normal and acceptable behaviours</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Consequences of not meeting family rules and expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>C: Skills</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use ethnically sensitive and legal approach to define problem</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Identify informal support system</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Explain family involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Assessment</strong></td>
<td><strong>A: Attitudes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Toward authority role, ethnic differences, mutual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B: Knowledge</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Influence of racial/ethnic background on assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ethnically relevant information for assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Potential danger for noncompliance due to ethnic differences</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>C: Skills</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Assess willingness to participate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Identify individual vs family involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Access to family’s network</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Assess strengths and motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4 Case Planning</strong></td>
<td><strong>A: Attitudes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Toward goal setting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contracting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Fear of the racist image</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Value of family involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Expectations of external resources</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>B: Knowledge</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family value and the law in goal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ethnically specific services and support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ethnically sensitive measures of progress</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>C: Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use appropriate strategies in contracting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Communicate effectively in goal-setting process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Intervention</strong></td>
<td><strong>A: Attitudes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexibility to ethnic needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aware of client’s limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Willingness to evaluate worker’s perception and past experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>B: Knowledge</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• About the intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• About worker’s adaptability to work with ethnic issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Impact of worker’s knowledge about this ethnic group on the intervention plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Impact of CPS policies on choice of intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>C: Skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tailor the intervention to ethnic context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Perform consonant tasks with the family’s ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Communicate about intervention’s cultural relevance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### PHASES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TRAINING AND EVALUATION AREAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Attitudes</td>
<td>B: Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **6 Evaluation** | • Toward expected outcome  
• Willingness to accept family’s definition  
• Beliefs affecting data collection for evaluation | • Relevant information to measure outcome  
• About family strengths  
• About ethnic characteristics and effectiveness | • Help family understand outcomes  
• Gain confidence  
• Obtain information from informal support |
| **7 Termination** | • Toward verbal or nonverbal reactions  
• Comfort level  
• Toward hostility | • Preparing for termination  
• Communication tools  
• Ethic-based reactions  
• Values and customers related to termination | • Use examples or metaphors  
• Encourage expression of feelings toward termination  
• Validate experience and summarize information  
• Identify appropriate resources following termination |

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**E) The Organizational Cultural Competence Change Model** by Ganaway and McPhatter (2003) is a comprehensive social work framework on cultural competency which addresses organizations and individual social workers. The authors point out some of the challenges that face organizations which try to implement cultural competency: Examples of such challenges include lack of funding, lack of internal expertise on diversity, staffing shortages, poorly prepared labour force, and a belief that an occasional workshop is sufficient to prepare workers who work with diverse clientele.

Inter-professional barriers — the authors describe the collaborative nature of child welfare work in which social workers and supervisors work together to ensure ongoing consultation when tackling challenging issues. Similarly, inter-professional dialogue should also be a major part of that collaboration process. Workforce composition often depicts inter-
professional barriers to cultural competency mainly because child welfare workers do not represent the racial or cultural diversity of the families and communities they serve. The authors note that, although some minority groups are over-represented in the child welfare system services, the majority of the child welfare social workers in both United States and indeed in Canada are white (Caucasian). The authors also assert some white workers often say that they are tired of hearing about racism and may believe that their co-workers of colour are simply hypersensitive. Relationships between workers may therefore remain strained and effectively stall cultural competence (Ganaway & McPhatter, 2003).

Proschaska and DiClemente (1982) are renowned for their work on alcohol and drug treatment. Their summary of the change process, described below, was adopted by Ganaway and McPhatter (2003) to illustrate the organizational cultural competence change model:

- **Precontemplation**: Individuals’ lack an awareness of a need for change.
- **Contemplation**: Individuals/organizations are aware that need exists, may be giving serious consideration to a response, have not yet committed to doing so.
- **Preparation**: Participants express clear intentions to change and make some efforts, planning mode.
- **Action**: Participants’ expressed commitment to change turns into observable activities with time, energy, and resources being expended.
- **Maintenance**: Participants incorporate actions and behavioral change into normal individual organizational patterns, changes are routine; structures in place to stabilize efforts (Proschaska & DiClemente, 1982, as quoted in Ganaway & McPhatter, 2003, p 111–123).
Ganaway and McPhatter point out the following revealing individual barriers to cultural competency among social workers

1. Workers may believe society is colorblind or a melting pot, and “therefore, we are all members of the human race.” Workers often use this in training as justification for the uselessness of cultural diversity training.

2. Workers may lack knowledge about other histories, cultures, lifestyles, customs, traditions, family structures, and so on.

3. Workers may lack understanding of the dynamics of oppression and how they are manifested in individual and institutional racism. This vacuum prevents individuals from developing empathy or appropriate intervention skills for the people who carry the brunt of oppression both externally and internally (2003, p. 105).

The tables by Ganaway and McPhatter (2003) (see Appendix F) illustrate possible strategies of effecting cultural competency to individuals, organizations, and inter-professionally.

**Cultural Competency and Formal Social Work Education Curriculum**

Over the last three decades, many scholars have advocated for cultural competency education and training. There is considerable consensus among many scholars that, as a prerequisite to effective interpersonal helping, cultural studies should be emphasized in all social work curricula. Dominelli (1988), Lie, and Este (1999), and Ronnau (1994) point out that the “use of self” nature of social work practice requires that practitioners know themselves as thoroughly as possible. Hence, culturally competent professionals are those who: 1) accept that significant differences do exist between people of different cultures, 2) admit lack of knowledge, and 3) develop a commitment to search for that knowledge.
Inclusion of cultural competency materials in social work curricula can prepare students for work in multicultural settings. Strategies for teaching cultural competency should be ingenious and preferably tested. Although teaching strategies may vary among institutions, the main objectives should include ideas such as 1) to raise the student’s awareness about the importance of being culturally competent; 2) to create an atmosphere in which students and teachers can question and share their knowledge about culture, and 3) to increase the amount of information students have about cultures, including their own (Ronnau, 1994)

Ronnau (1994, p. 32) also offers the following five tested strategies:

1. Students are introduced to key definitions pertaining to cultural awareness and the culturally competent professional
2. Resource papers about the cultures to be discussed are provided
3. Students are asked to serve as cultural guides (volunteer role players representing certain cultures)
4. Students are informed of cultural awareness activities that are occurring on campus and in nearby communities
5. Implications of the cultural awareness material are highlighted and discussed throughout the semester.

Other scholars have observed that, even though it is the prerogative of every institution to design their curriculum according to the needs in their geographic area, a teaching model which focuses on the interpersonal component of culturally sensitive practice and cross-cultural empathy can encourage both learners and educators to self-assess and self-define prior to cross-cultural interaction (Garland & Escobar, 1988, Nakanishi & Rittner, 1992, Pinderhughes, 1989, Proctor & Davis, 1994, Sue, 1981, as cited in Lie & Este, 1999).
Social work students should be prepared to recognize how personal and professional values may conflict with, or accommodate the needs of diverse clients. Therefore, schools of social work should endeavour to help students at the outset to identify norms that perpetuate individual, institutional, and cultural racism, and block learning. The following are examples of barriers to cultural competency learning by Dominelli (1988, pp. 71–72).

1. Denial: the refusal to accept that racism (or other “isms”) exists
2. Omission: the refusal to see the relevance of race (gender, ethnicity, class, age, ability, sexual orientation) in most situations
3. Decontextualization: an acceptance that racism (or other “isms”) exists in general but the refusal to believe it permeates every activity
4. Color blindness: treating people of color (or those with other obvious differences) as if they were not, thereby negating their experience of racism (sexism, ableism, ageism)
5. Dumping: blaming the victim by holding people of color responsible for racism (and people with other differences responsible for the corresponding “ism”)
6. Patronizing: although mainstream ways are considered superior, other ways are tolerated
7. Avoidance: there is an awareness that race (or gender, ethnicity, class, age, ability, sexual orientation) is a factor but opportunities for addressing it are avoided

Students attending some schools of social work in Canada may not be required to take foundational cultural courses, which will put them at a disadvantage when they embark on careers such as child protection. The ideal way of ensuring that social work students acquire some cultural competence would be to include cultural studies material in each social work...
However, given the variations in social work programs across Canada, cultural material is taught at various stages. According to Alaggia and Marziali, as cited in Al-Krenawi and Graham (2003), curricular changes across Canadian social work programs throughout the 1980s expanded theoretical practice models beyond a Eurocentric perspective, to advance the teaching of cross-cultural practice. As a result, competency standards for professional practice were proposed in many Canadian jurisdictions. However, “the adoption of the standards has been slow, owing to the proliferation of multiple definitions of efficient and effective culturally competent practice” (p. 155). An example of an attempt to articulate the minimum standards for culturally sensitive practice is the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics, which was revised in 2005 (CASW, 2005).

**Cultural Competency Indicators**

Since the research question in this study seeks to assess how culturally competent intake social workers are in Northern British Columbia, it is imperative to address some of the indicators of cultural competence. As much as it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of responses to diversity, it is important that practitioners are helped to choose appropriate and effective interventions so that they and their employers can be held accountable for their professional behaviour and services provided, respectively. The following are examples of cultural competency indicators:

1) Review of organizational mission statements for evidence of support of cultural diversity

2) Outreach and hiring procedures that encourage engagement of people from historically undervalued and undeserved groups

3) Training in cultural competency for staff
4) Policy and procedure manuals that support goals of diversity and cultural competency for staff

5) Staff hiring targets to increase diversity of the staff

6) Visible efforts within organization to make the organization more welcoming to all cultural linguistic groups (Capitman et al., as cited in Geron, 2002, p. 42)

The above types of assessments are problematic since they rely on observable indicators of, for example, the extent of staff diversity or written statements of support for diversity, rather than real evidence that culturally competent service is or is not being provided. The latter can also be manipulated because staff will know what they need to write in order to receive a higher cultural competency rating (Geron, 2002). Geron, however, notes:

While it is undoubtedly true that it is better for an agency to have, for example written mission statements that support multiculturalism and diversity, the presence of such statements is not sufficient evidence that the agency is providing culturally competent care just as the absence of such a statement is not sufficient evidence that it is not. Cultural competency, like the best healthcare or child protective service is not entirely rule-driven.” Given the complexity and multidimensional nature of cultural competency, the author proposes multi-item indicators as they are necessary to increase reliability of the assessment (p. 42)

**Pressing Challenges in Northern Child Welfare Practice**

Over-representation of minority children in the child welfare system, especially those of Aboriginal ancestry in Northern British Columbia, has been well-documented. According to recent statistics, Aboriginal children make up 9.3 percent of the child population of British Columbia, while approximately half of all children in care in British Columbia are of Aboriginal ancestry (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2007)
The proportion of the child population which is Aboriginal is expected to continue to grow. Consequently, the needs for programs and services to serve these children and families will increase. Although work is underway to address the key systemic issues undermining the health of Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal children continue to be over-represented among those served by the ministry. Aboriginal children account for approximately 9 percent of the child population, but make up 49 percent of children-in-care (see Chart 1), and 42 percent of youth in custody. Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2008/2009 Service Plan.

**Figure 3. B.C. Children-in-Care Trends (1990–2005)**

As of December 2008, 35.2 percent of the Northern BC population was Aboriginal, while 79.1 percent of children in care in the region were Aboriginal (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2008/2009 Service Plan).

Various policies have been introduced and implemented, with little success, in the reduction of percentages of Aboriginal children in government care. Perhaps providing culturally relevant and effective interventions to communities can lead to meaningful collaboration between social workers and affected communities, with the aim of empowering the communities to address childcare issues. Commonsense calls for a re-evaluation of the effectiveness of intervention strategies that have been attempted with individuals within communities. It is unfortunate that, even though the child welfare system articulates the need to understand differences based on ethnic orientations, many programs and policies reflect values and attitudes that are congruent with those of the majority culture (Jenson & Whittaker, 1989).

The attempt by the Government of British Columbia to allow some Aboriginal communities to run their own child protection agency is laudable. However, in the absence of adequate resources to address problems that determine the parents’ ability to care for their children, a significant decrease in the admission of Aboriginal children into government care may not be realizable. Allowing more resources for culturally competent, formal social work education, and subsequent in-service training may be worthwhile resource investments. Providing the current child protection workers with more cultural competency training can help bridge the recruitment gap for the newly delegated agencies as they continue to train their own.
Family Development Response (FDR)

Family Development Response (FDR) is a program for families where the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development child protection workers have received a child protection report, assessed it as needing a protective response, and determined that FDR is the most appropriate intervention. The objective of this approach is to improve parenting knowledge, behaviours, and family dynamics to enhance the quality of family life through education and support. Family Development Response is intended to engage the family in a co-operative, solution-focused process to resolve low to moderate risk issues. The program is time limited and based on a strength-based assessment approach. An individual comprehensive assessment of the family is undertaken, using the North Carolina Family Assessment Scale, to identify strengths, risks, and supports available, in order to reduce risks. The approach recognizes that, if complex needs are to be addressed effectively, interventions must be based on preferences, strengths, and what works for the family. Service will be delivered in the family’s home, or other community locations (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2006).

The FDR process is one of the most progressive undertakings by the Ministry of Children and Family Development in British Columbia since the program also offers an alternative dispute process, known as collaborative practice. Alternative dispute processes offer parents and/or other stakeholders avenues by which they can negotiate disputes and complicated child welfare matters. Intake and/or FDR social workers may consider alternative, collaborative, and dispute resolutions at any stage of child protection investigation (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2008/2009 Service Plan).
Collaborative practices involve shared planning and decision making which include processes such as Mediation, Family Group Conferencing, and Traditional Decision Making. The use of collaborative decision making often avoids the need for court involvement. These processes are voluntary and confidential as described in the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*. Child protection social workers are expected to work collaboratively with other professionals, agencies, and community leadership agencies (e.g., Band leaders) to ensure inclusion of alternative dispute resolution is considered. Examples of alternative dispute resolution methods include:

**Family Group Conference**

The family group conference, which is also known as family group decision making, is a shared decision-making process for families receiving child welfare services. It is a formal meeting where members of a child or youth's family come together with extended family, close friends, and members of the community, to develop a plan for the child. A family group conference coordinator helps families to identify and invite people who will support them in developing a plan for their child. Family group conferences are designed to promote cooperative planning and decision making and to enhance a family's support network (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2008/2009 Service Plan).

**Mediation**

Sometimes family members and child welfare workers disagree on the best way to meet a child's individual needs. Child Protection Mediation is a process for working out disagreements with the help of a trained, impartial person (a mediator). Mediators do not judge right or wrong, nor do they make decisions. Instead, they encourage people to focus on
common interests and to work towards a mutually acceptable solution (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2008/2009 Service Plan)

**Cultural and/or Traditional Decision Making and Dispute Resolution Processes**

Traditional decision-making processes are ways of planning and/or resolving disagreements by following community or cultural models and practices. For example, in some Aboriginal communities, Elders may have a key role to play in guiding families and a child welfare worker through a decision-making process (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2008/2009 Service Plan).

In the literature review, the following three aspects (among others) were addressed in detail: common terminologies that are used in this study, a historical review of cultural competency in child welfare, and relevant cultural competency frameworks, past and present. The literature review has provided me with a knowledge base for my field of inquiry, including facts and applicable ideas from a number of eminent scholars.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

The exploratory nature of this research project necessitated the use of a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative research is described by Creswell (1998) as an inquiry process based on distinct methodological traditions that explore social situations or human problems. The same author asserts that the background of qualitative research is the extensive collection of data from multiple sources of information. Ragin (as cited in Creswell, 1998), states the latter’s key difference with quantitative inquiry is that those researchers work with fewer variables and many cases, while qualitative researchers rely on a few cases and many variables, and factors cannot be controlled as they would be in a quantitative study. By seeking the experiences of individual child protection social workers, I have therefore collected interpretive data which cannot be generalized.

Research Methods and Design

The above methodology addressed my philosophical conceptualization of cultural competency. The steps that I took to gather, organize, and present the data collected from participants include sample selection and the data collection procedure.

Sample Selection

Six participants were chosen, all of whom were government-employed child protection social workers. Subjects were recruited using snowball and purposive sampling methods, which are non-probability sampling techniques. The snowball technique involves identifying members of the population (child protection social workers) and having them contact others in the population within Northern British Columbia (Marlow, 2001). The purposive method involves a researcher’s investment in attracting participants who possess
the most relevant characteristics to a study (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007) The technique helped in recruiting subjects in smaller communities, as well as in maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. The subjects, all of whom were child protection social workers, were recruited through professional referrals from the researcher’s social work colleagues. The recruits were from several different communities across Northern British Columbia. The subjects were chosen because of their vast experience and knowledge of child protection work, their analytical skills, and their ability to articulate in depth about the topic.

Notwithstanding the anticipated limitations, the criteria for selecting the social workers were

1. Social workers with BSW minimum education,
2. Practitioners with child welfare specialization and at least three years of experience working in Northern BC as child protection workers

In my study, there were five females and one male, all from the MCFD North Region.

Letters of consent were emailed to the participants, after which participants replies were screened to confirm that they met the required criteria, and would be willing to reveal their experiences. During the interview, conducted by phone, open-ended questions and a tape recorder were used to collect and record the one and one-half hour interviews.

**Data Collection**

My method of collecting data was the use of telephone interviews. Kvale (1996) describes the interview as a stage upon which knowledge is constructed through the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee roles. The interviewees were provided with a context for the interview by a briefing at the beginning and a debriefing at the end of the
process. The briefing defined the purpose of the interview, the use of the tape recorder, and requests to the subjects for their answers to the questions.

All interviewees were asked the following ten questions:

1. What aspects of your ethnic or cultural background are relevant to social work?
2. Personal culture (also called core identity) consists of the entirety of an individual’s personal meaning system—beliefs, values, perceptions, assumptions, and explanatory frameworks about reality. Tell me about an incident when you encountered a challenge to your personal culture.
3. Social workers in general sometimes experience cultural dilemmas (uncertainties) in their practice. Can you recall any dilemmas that you have experienced?
4. What personal verbal and nonverbal barriers to effective communication are social workers likely to experience when working with culturally diverse clientele?
5. Tell me some of the most common cultural competencies for maintaining effective communication and relationships with culturally diverse clientele that often come up among your colleagues.
6. What is your commitment to becoming culturally competent?
7. How much time do you spend engaging in cross-cultural professional exchanges with your colleagues?
8. Can you describe the best cross-cultural moments you have had with a client?
9. Social workers sometimes engage with appropriate mediators when working with culturally diverse clientele. How helpful has the latter been to you as a child protection social worker?
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of culture?
The interview was semi-structured, meaning that it had the sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested open-ended questions for which the subject was asked to go into detail with their response (Marlow, 2001). Immediately after the interview, participants were debriefed by discussing how each of them found the interview experience. I kept a journal during the interview process in which I wrote significant observations. In the journal, I observed that most of the participants were comfortable sharing their experiences, and two participants expressed to me that they found it helpful to share their thoughts with a colleague as they did not have to explain a lot in their answers. Examples of participants’ experiences while working with MCFD included travel, work, and residence in remote Northern communities. Other participants talked about their holiday travels and the experience of meeting people from other cultural backgrounds. I also noted that, at the end of the interviews, the majority of the participants humorously responded to my debriefing statements, indicating that they did not require debriefing. One participant observed “don’t worry, Anthony, I am okay.” My reaction to participants’ responses was generally calm but inquisitive, and a few times I positively responded to humorous moments with laughter. Perhaps the most prevalent reactions in my journal were related to rephrasing some questions where participants provided very short answers. I was able to gather more information by rephrasing the interview questions.

**Data Analysis**

**Content Analysis**

The interview data, collected by use of a digital audio recorder, was transcribed into word text. Content analysis and thematic content analysis were used to describe, analyze, and present the findings, as illustrated by Anderson (2007), Holsti (1969), and Krippendorff.
Krippendorff defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from data to their context” (p 21). Another definition by Paisley, as cited in Holsti, (1969) describes content analysis as a phase of information processing in which communication content is transformed, through subjective and systematic application of categorization rules, into data that can be summarized and compared. Content analysis is a broad methodology used in both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Given the deductive nature of content analysis, the research settled for the inductive thematic content analysis, which is an offshoot of content analysis (Anderson, 2007).

Thematic Content Analysis

The first step in analyzing my data involved an initial reading of the participant responses to identify meaning units. Using double spacing, I circled segments within paragraphs and wrote short notes or reflections in between the lines. The second step involved a second reading of the responses to establish manifest themes (surface meaning of the content). I used colour codes to identify common phrases and came up with 15 manifest themes. A third reading involved a more critical analysis of the responses (reading between the lines), which culminated in what Holsti (1969) refers to as “latent themes.” At this stage, significant categories from the transcripts had undergone a systematic method of constant comparison. This method involved “moving back and forth among data sets to discover patterns and determine the presence, variation or absence of patterns” (Sandelowski, Davis, & Harris, 1989, p 82). Finally, responses were read once again to ensure that no important information was left out. The latent themes were eventually integrated into a descriptive narrative that may help illuminate cultural awareness, or lack thereof, among child protection social workers who work with culturally diverse communities.
Methodological Integrity

Credibility

Morrow (2005) suggests that the very nature of qualitative research is subjective, hence the need to address the researcher bias and the truth value. Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that internal validity (in quantitative research) assumes that there is a tangible reality to be measured, but in qualitative research, measuring multiple realities (which the authors termed as credibility) requires that results of information gathered from informants be adequately represented. Therefore, there is a need for testing findings against various groups from which the data were drawn or persons who are familiar with the phenomenon. In this study, member checking, reflexivity, and peer debriefing were used as credibility measures.

Member Checking

After the first reading of the interview transcripts, the researcher embarked on “member checking,” a process during which verification and confirmation of data and themes are sought from participants, by providing both interview transcripts and the manifest themes to the participants (Krefting, 1991). The researcher also periodically sought the participants’ feedback during the interview and analysis processes to ensure accuracy of data. The process helped in the summarizing of both the initial and final themes. The majority of the participants only confirmed the accuracy of the manifest and latent themes and expressed their satisfaction with the findings. However, one participant who works in a remote community, reiterated the importance of the fifth latent theme and his hope that MCFD will take advantage of the Internet and other modern media technology to advance cultural
Since I had already identified the theme, in my final analysis I decided to include the theme as part of my future research.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity, according to Ruby, (as cited in Krefting, 1991, p 218), refers to assessment of the influence of the researcher's own background, perceptions, and interests on the qualitative research process. It is important to note that reflexivity in qualitative research is co-constructed with the researcher and the participant. The issue of reflexivity (self reflection) was addressed before and after the interview process. During the data collection and analysis phases, I kept a self-reflective journal which I used as a tool to examining personal reactions to the research process, as well as a reflection on assumptions that arose during the research, as illustrated in Orthhipp (2008). In so doing, I was able to explain key personal biases and how I dealt with them in order to maintain truth value fairness in research.

My reflexive journal detailed how biases were dealt with prior to, and during the interview.

Before the Interviews

As a child protection social worker interviewing other child protection workers, I was aware that I may harbour some biases and a lack of neutrality. I have my own opinions regarding the state of cultural competency in our region. I have personal ideas of what works and what may need improvement. I was therefore aware of the possibility of partiality in my role as the interviewer. During my thesis proposal, I addressed some of my 'cultural baggage,' which represented a critical self reflection. I also bore in mind Young and Haverkamp's (2007) assertion regarding familiarity with existing literature, that the critical issue is not what one knows or believes, but how one makes use of that knowledge in designing and conducting research.
**During the Interviews**

I personally knew only two of the participants, but since they were not close friends interviewing them was not different from those I had never met. Given our common experiences, working for the same employer (MCFD), I found myself anticipating some of the answers to my questions. I tried to remain objective with my probing questions as much as possible, but also offered some personal opinions to encourage the conversation.

**Peer Debriefing**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize the need for peer debriefing as an important strategy that can help keep the researcher honest. The authors add that questions and answers from a peer may contribute to deeper reflexive analysis by the researcher. The draft narrative of my thesis was read by an impartial friend who is also a researcher in an unrelated discipline. The latter challenged me with questions throughout the analysis process, which challenged me to confront personal values thereby eliminating some biases. Krefting (1991) observed that peer debriefing is based on the same idea as member checking, only that the former involves an impartial colleague who has research experience.

**Dependability and Rigour and Relevance**

Dependability (known as reliability in quantitative research) refers to how data throughout a research process can be tracked and publicly inspected to verify the conclusion (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). In this research study, I have detailed with consistency the data collection process and results of the study to ensure that the collected data fairly represents the findings (Patton, 2002). I also addressed the issue of rigor in the application of theory and methods that fit with the study. As much as possible, critical theory and thematic content analysis were applied in many sections within this study in line with
what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as compliance to the research community’s public standards and agreement about the appropriate ways to create knowledge.

Relevance is described as the degree to which findings of research apply to the experience of practice and whether the findings resonate with those working within the area being researched (Dodge, Ospina, & Foldy, 2005) I addressed the challenges faced by child protection intake workers when grappling with the complex issues of culture and social work practice. The research sheds light on the need and complexity of practitioners’ self evaluation and how best to address child protection cases in culturally competent ways. Also, both the research question and findings epitomized relevance in the intake social worker’s practice, since the debate about cultural competency is an ongoing process.

**Ethical Considerations**

Consideration of ethical issues is of paramount importance in the design of a research project. It revolves primarily around the balancing of the protection of subjects from harm and deception, providing confidentiality, privacy, and the freedom to conduct and publish research findings (Punch, 1986). Accurate and honest information regarding this research was provided in advance to potential participants. This included their role, the role of the researcher, how data would be gathered, how information would be managed and stored, who will have access to information, and any potential risks. This allowed the participants to make decisions about participation based on ‘informed consent’.

However, there are two areas that required careful consideration with respect to my role in this research. The first pertained to my employment role with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and specifically, how I was going to develop trust amongst the MCFD participants (intake workers) that I recruited. Although my research role
was that of a student of University of Northern British Columbia, it would be naïve to assume that participants would easily disassociate me from my other role of a government employee, which I feared could have affected their trust in me. The other consideration was one of how to reconcile my ongoing employment role as a child protection social worker while also maintaining integrity in my research about MCFD cultural competency practice, as part of the fulfillment of academic requirements for a graduate degree.

The first challenge was addressed by detailing all the expectations regarding participation in the information letter to participants. I made follow-up calls to ensure that the participants clearly appreciated the content of the letter and to answer any questions and/or concerns. The second issue remained a challenge throughout the research process since I maintained my social work position within the organization (MCFD). However, I was able to reflexively maintain a clear focus on the study while also observing and appreciating the cultural learning opportunities that presented themselves while working with families. In one sad occasion during my research, I was involved in organising a funeral for an individual who was involved with MCFD whose ethnic background was different from my own. Attending the funeral provided me with an opportunity to experience, first hand, how people from that particular culture deal with grief and loss.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

Analysis of Themes

Introduction

The six participants interviewed in this study voiced various views on the state of cultural competency in Northern BC’s child protection services, including personal and professional views on challenges, wishes, and needs for better practice. In this chapter, the research findings are analyzed, supported by some significant excerpts from the interview transcripts. An illustration of the main issues raised by the interview participants is captured in the following table. The first column includes 15 Manifest (initial themes), the second column outlines the Latent (major themes), while the final column highlights the researcher’s reflections on the interview results.

The following qualitative data, in the form of text resulting from the interview questions, was examined using content analysis and thematic analysis. As explained in the methodology section above, this analysis involved four steps. The first step was reading the interview transcripts and taking notes or reflections from all participants. The second reading involved highlighting ‘surface meaning,’ resulting in 15 manifest themes, the third reading involved a critical analysis of the responses which culminated in five latent themes. The fourth and final reading ensured that no important information was left out (Holsti, 1969).

Manifest themes which were identified during the author’s second reading of interview transcripts were not predetermined, as can be the case in some content analysis studies.

The Manifest Themes are the participants’ expressions regarding cultural competency in MCFD, while the Latent Themes are my critical analyses of the Manifest Themes.
Table 3 provides a thematic analysis of the interviews

**Table 3. Thematic Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manifest Themes</th>
<th>Latent Themes</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) There is limited cultural discussion and interaction among social workers at work places, which would otherwise help in keeping up with ongoing cultural changes within various client groups</td>
<td>1) Cultural discussions and interaction needed</td>
<td>Cultural discussions and interaction (among social workers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Social workers who can clearly articulate their ethnic cultural background appear to be more aware of how their ethnic cultural background may impact their relationship with clients</td>
<td>2) Knowledge base and in-service training needs expansion</td>
<td>Knowledge base and in-service training</td>
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<tr>
<td>3) Importance of social workers knowing the common stereotypes, inappropriate and disrespectful gestures or conducts within their community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4) What social workers should do when they are involved in confrontations regarding their own ethnic or personal culture</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5) Preparatory education and in-service training</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- although MCFD acknowledges the need for social workers to be culturally competent, the ministry does not allow time or opportunities for social workers to improve on cultural competency skills,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- limited cultural training prior to joining MCFD (only aboriginal studies and northern remote social work practice), hence the need for broader</td>
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Cultural Competency, Child Protection Intake Workers, and Northern BC Experiences
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6) Lack of time to apply cultural perspectives adequately due to professional demand of child protection work</th>
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<tr>
<td>7) Difficulties in balancing the best interest of the child and cultural issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>8) Exposure to both a variety of clientele and interaction with diverse communities within and outside BC can help improve cultural awareness among social workers</td>
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<tr>
<td>9) The need for and importance of social workers having allies within their clients’ communities</td>
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<tr>
<td>10) Importance of exposing social workers to a variety of work settings where there may be opportunities for various cultural interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Working with individuals who do not like to be associated with their culture. Some of who were brought up in care of MCFD and embellish, e.g., the Western culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>12) Rapport building may be more difficult within metropolitan clients than it is in the rural clients</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>3) Balancing Act is difficult</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balancing Act (child protection vs cultural consideration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- time factor (Caseload management including urgency of some tasks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- skills (Moral visions recognition during assessments and investigations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- legal issues (articulation, educating clients and upholding the law)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- leadership (more support/supervision for workers when dealing with delicate cultural issues)</td>
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<tr>
<th>4) Exposure to both a variety of clientele and diverse communities’ extroversion is demanding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to both a variety of clientele and diverse communities, regions, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- deployment (operational requirements with incentives especially for remote postings)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- encouraging holiday travel (to unfamiliar cultural communities, regions, etc.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
13) Policy guidelines for supervisors (team leaders) on how to encourage cultural competency

14) The influence of one’s family background in their future social work careers

15) Importance of exposing social workers to a variety of work settings where there may be opportunities for various cultural interactions

5) Rethinking creativity (to encourage pursuit of cultural competency in child protection) is needed

- motivation (incentives/nature of northern practice)
- modern virtual advantages (Internet)
- leadership (policy and management influence (e.g., team leaders’ work/consultation)
- involvement with multicultural agencies (e.g., workshops for new immigrants)
- data banks (interpreters and ethnic social workers for consultancy)

### Manifest Themes

The participants raised many issues, some of which pointed to their good experiences, wishes, and concerns regarding cultural competency issues. Most of the issues raised were repeatedly emphasized in all the interviews. The issue of limited cultural discussion and interaction among social workers at work places was raised. Participants observed that there was neither enough time nor opportunity for workers to interact and to discuss ongoing cultural changes within client groups. Participants observed that the latter would help in the exchange of real and practical ideas on how to work with families within the community.

One participant noted:

_We don’t meet with the Aboriginal agency much at all anymore, we have met twice in the last eight months, and we don’t have a lot of team meetings because of the nature of the (work location) so it’s sort of just the individual things, I can’t say we spend much time together at all._

Participants, expressed a willingness to pursue culturally competent practice, and pointed to the lack of time to apply cultural perspectives adequately due to the professional
demands of child protection work. All participants concurred that the demands of child protection work, including the urgency of some tasks, tight schedules, and overwhelming paperwork, left little room for other endeavours, such as the pursuit of cultural issues. All participants expressed frustration in balancing the best interests of the child and cultural issues, mainly due to time constraints. A participant who was asked to estimate the amount of time she/he spent engaging in cross-cultural professional exchanges with colleagues responded:

not enough, we don’t have a lot of time for that kind of stuff but in staff meetings
We have staff meetings once a week and we have meetings with the Aboriginal family support workers in the community once a month.

A few participants who practice in remote communities reported that exposure to both a variety of clientele and interaction with diverse communities, within and outside BC, had helped them improve their cultural awareness. The latter, some of whom are well travelled, were able to articulate their ethnic cultural background, and appear to be more aware of how their ethnic cultural background impacts their relationship with clients. A participant observed that:

in most of my work in the last three and a half years my sole focus has been on [community] and other Aboriginal people but if I did come across a culture that I had no idea of what their values or beliefs were, I would quickly learn before having to go into their home. If we are going to people’s home and into their personal lives it is really important that we do that respectively and part of doing that respectfully is knowing who they are and where they are from.

Participants who have practiced in rural and urban areas observed that they found rapport building more difficult with metropolitan clients than with rural clients, due to the complex mixture of cultural practices. For example, a participant voiced difficulty in working
with individuals who do not like to be associated with their own ethnic culture, some of whom were brought up in the care of MCFD, and embrace, for example, the Western culture.

The need and importance of social workers to have allies within their clients’ communities was raised, with participants expressing the need for more interaction with other professionals and leaders within the community. Subsequently, some participants proposed exposing social workers to a variety of work settings where there may be opportunities for a variety of professional and cultural interactions. Hence, allowing social workers opportunities to learn about, for example, the common stereotypes, inappropriate and disrespectful gestures or conducts within their community. One participant had this to say:

*for example, this gentleman who I was talking to you before, he had a high position in one of the families which I was dealing with, he was one of the elders, so he came to a family meeting and helped mediate the family meeting so I got to sit there during this meeting and I said these are the ministry issues, what we are worried about for this family, this is what we are concerned about for the safety of these kids, how are you as a family are going to deal with these issues and he was able to mediate the meeting by saying we are keeping our kids in our home, and the ministry is not going to take them, so, how are we going to keep these kids safe that is what this man wants to know*

The influence of one’s family background in their future social work careers was also raised, with some participants expressing concern about difficulty in dealing with confrontations involving their own ethnic or personal culture. Participants pointed to a lack of adequate preparatory education and in-service training and noted that
Although MCFD acknowledges the need for social workers to be culturally competent, the Ministry does not allow time or opportunities for social workers to improve cultural competency skills.

There is limited cultural training prior to joining MCFD (only Aboriginal studies and Northern remote social work practice), hence the need for broader cultural awareness courses.

There is need for training opportunities and/or refresher course on cultural competency for MCFD employees.

Also, there is a need for cultural practice training and exposure to a variety of cultural experiences, due to cultural changes and the evolving nature of service requirements.

Finally, participants discussed the lack of clear leadership and policy guidelines pertaining to cultural issues and expressed a wish that supervisors (team leaders) should be trained to assume more active roles in encouraging culturally competent practice.

The above manifest themes came from non-critical readings of the interview transcripts. The third reading involved a keen look at deeper meanings from the transcripts, which led to the following five major themes, otherwise known as latent themes. The rest of this chapter will focus on the latent themes. The following five themes resulted from a critical analysis of the manifest themes.

**Latent Themes**

1. Cultural discussions and interaction (among social workers)
2. Knowledge base and in-service training
3. Balancing Act (child protection vs cultural consideration)
4. Exposure to both a variety of clientele and diverse communities
Rethinking creativity (to encourage pursuit of cultural competency in child protection)

The above themes are presented in no particular order and some of them have sub-themes. The themes include interpretive summaries which will be enriched by the inclusion of quotations from interview participants.

1. Cultural discussions and interaction (among social workers includes the need for):
   - Leadership (initiatives by supervisors and managers)
   - Forum (where/when cultural competency knowledge can be acquired)
   - Opportunity (weekly meetings/yearly team days)
   - Incentive (recognition by employer of some sacrifices in working in northern remote areas)

The above observations regarding limited cultural discussions and interaction among social workers at workplaces were consistent among all participants. The reasons the majority of participants suggested, as a possible explanation, included low priority of cultural issues compared to other issues and tasks due to the pressure of work, as well as a lack of incentives to promote initiative among workers. Regardless, all participants expressed interest in pursuing cultural competency if more support and time were allocated for cultural interaction. Lack of clear guidelines from the managers, as well as lack of incentives to encourage involvement in cultural issues, emerged as some of the deficiencies. Participants pointed to the need for opportunities, in addition to team meetings, for informal cultural experience sharing whenever opportunities present at work places. One of the participants noted
as social workers get stuck on tracking individual cases or handing over tasks back and forth to each other at team meetings or handing over files to aboriginal agencies for them to look at what is culturally needed. The Aboriginal staff have quite a large staff and they are doing a lot of good work on welfare and child protection if you will; Looks like we should have joint meetings but the current team leader has decided that because of the way the joint meetings got so gossipy, which led to a lot of tension between the two agencies, the meetings were found to be too time consuming so that we are actually not having them anymore

Another participant cited isolation. Due to the geographical nature of Northern British Columbia, there are several small remote communities that have only one MCFD child protection social worker. That person may not always have the same opportunities that are available to workers in larger urban communities. Although there has been improvement in communication infrastructure, workers in remote outposts miss out on socializing and interactive workshop opportunities which their colleagues in urban centres can access.

Well, I would probably say compared to my other colleagues I am very low on that scale, and I am the only social worker in my office and so most of my interaction in regard to cross cultural exchanges are conversations with my supervisor or conversations with other professional systems within my workplace such as contracted agency that work with MCFD.

One participant observed that the Ministry of Children and Family Development acknowledges the need for cultural competency but does not do enough to encourage its pursuit by its workers. A systematic process that allows social workers to appreciate differences is the cornerstone to ethnically sensitive practice. Therefore, instead of reliance on occasional training and workshop opportunities, organizations should have tools in place that can help child protection workers to manageably apply ethnically sensitive practice.
again very little time is spent speaking to my colleagues about culture, I mean let’s face it we are always faced with short staff and, if you want to talk about the culture of such a large organization such as MCFD, you know MCFD acknowledges the need for social workers to be culturally diverse yet they don’t allow the time for us to work on our cultural skills, they don’t allow it. So very little time is spent in this organization on that.

Knowledge base and in-service training requires

- formal education (college/university, e.g., articulation of personal ethnic cultural heritage),
- informal education (in-service training and workshops),
- policy directives (employer’s recognition of improvement of cultural competency in the region)

Knowledge base and in-service training also featured prominently in the interviews, with consensus among most of the participants. Improvements are needed in all the above three observations. It was also evident from some of the interview comments that knowledge base for providing adequate preparatory culture awareness may be lacking in college courses. Also, all participants reiterated the need for more training and workshops for intake social workers as well as clear guidelines from the employer in culturally related policies.

Participants made observations about their university education experience

I went to the University in Northern British Columbia that was highly influenced by the Aboriginal studies, so that’s the one culture we focused on and that was it. There was not enough diversity as far as I am concerned but again if I went to SFU or UVIC maybe that would have been different because the cultures are way more diverse down there so I think my experience would have been different but as far as being a student of University of Northern British Columbia I was shunned from a lot
of other cultures I think, not shunned but just not focused on anything else but Aboriginal studies.

Another participant observed:

I did attend UNBC and the most helpful course that I took was actually in Glen Schmidt’s northern practice class, don’t quite remember the exact name of the class but it was like northern practice. You know he really connected me with my own values and ethics and which I have been able to use in my practice for over ten years. I truly would recommend that all new social workers take this course. I don’t know whether it’s still available but I found it invaluable to working in culturally acceptable practice in the north.

In order to be culturally sensitive, knowledge of one’s own biases is paramount and the inability to articulate one’s own ethnic cultural background can be a drawback in a culturally competency pursuit. When asked to describe their ethnic cultural background, one participant had this to say

I do not really know. I am just white and I don’t really practice any. In my personal life I don’t even practice any. Like I am not Aboriginal or I don’t know my culture very well.

Another participant expressed difficulty in addressing ethnocentrism:

that I am “Doukhobor” so they make fun of “Doukhobor” people in front of me and I have yet to figure out a way to adequately stand up for myself that makes me feel like I have accomplished something or changed their perspective or have them understand more. I either become angry and react or I get into silence. If there are lots of people talking about it or making fun of it I feel insecure and seek to get free of the situation.

All participants were in agreement that their employer has not provided enough opportunities for in-service training.
MCFD does talk about having cultural competencies they talk about it. But you know, they really do not come up with the money so that we can attend workshops, or have time to read or talk to people about their beliefs the cultural systems, we don’t have time and I think that we need to be aware of that the norms never stay static that they change and I think we need to be aware of the changes in the different client groups.

3 Balancing Act (child protection vs cultural consideration consists of)

- time factor (caseload management including urgency of some tasks)
- skills (moral visions recognition during assessments and investigations)
- legal issues (articulation, educating clients, and upholding the law)
- leadership (more support/supervision for workers when dealing with delicate cultural issues)

Balancing child safety and cultural consideration in child protection cases can be difficult for intake social workers. Time is usually of the essence and building rapport requires time. However, during investigations, culturally competent intake social workers can draw quick observations within a short time, which can elucidate a family’s moral vision. Social workers grapple with some cases where cultural beliefs and the law may be in conflict. Knowledge of the laws pertaining to child welfare matters can therefore be helpful to child protection social workers. In delicate cases, where an intake social worker may face some challenge, the support of a knowledgeable supervisor is invaluable.

In supporting and acknowledging the essence of cultural competency, one of the participants expressed the following:

*I think that is part of our role as being in the social field in working with others, people who are diverse, of diverse origins. We have an obligation to ensure that we are not infringing on the right of others or the cultural practices of others, just*
because of our positions Overall our goal is to ensure the safety of children, and we can still do that and still be culturally sensitive.

4 Exposure to both a variety of clientele and diverse communities’ extroversion (personal interest in the pursuit of cultural diversity) involves

- deployment (operational requirements/with incentives especially for remote postings),
- encouraging holiday travel (to unfamiliar cultural communities, regions, etc.)

Participants who are well travelled as well as those who have lived or worked in small remote communities had a much higher level of cultural competency and appreciation. Some participants commented that MCFD’s compensation or incentives for remote deployment is not attractive enough.

One participant who was not of Aboriginal ancestry expressed his interest, knowledge, and appreciation of the Aboriginal culture as follows:

*They have house systems in for example in ( ) they have a house system, they have eagle, they have wolf, they have killer whale and so on, and then there is the chief, right, and then there is a hierarchy within their house systems. So there is always a head there is head chief, so he is the head of the house, right, and then there is different roles under there, there is a speaker for the head of the house so this gentleman has taught me lots about this. So then they have a sub cast so it could be a wolf or the killer whale sub cast so culturally that means if, for example, if in his wife’s family, there is a death it is his responsibility to take care of all the arrangements to get together with spouses of the people so it breaks down the two responsibilities is within their house systems when different things happens like weddings, funerals or feasts, they call them feasts when they are bringing people to their homes when there is a new born child and when they want to name that child.
they put on a feast and then depending on where you sit at in your house there is responsibilities that you take on for the feast ..

5 Rethinking creativity (to encourage pursuit of cultural competency in child protection) involves

- motivation (incentives/nature of northern practice)
- modern virtual advantages (Internet)
- leadership (policy and management influence, e.g., team leaders’ work/consultation)
- involvements with multicultural agencies (e.g., workshops for new immigrants)
- data banks (interpreters and ethnic social workers for consultancy)

Rethinking creativity in the pursuit of cultural competency stems from acknowledging that many social workers and their employers may be willing to pursue cultural competency but lack the vision and/or organizational capacity. Motivational incentives may be required to encourage workers to take positions in remote areas where they can be immersed in the local culture. The use of modern technology, including the Internet, should be used to culturally sensitize workers. Managers should take a leading role in encouraging and promoting the importance of cultural competency in workplaces. Partnerships with cultural and multicultural agencies can be helpful in updating and enlightening child protection workers on demographic changes. Also, data banks for both language interpreters as well as social work ethnic cultural consultants can provide quick and ready reference when required.
I feel really isolated from training opportunities that are made available to other workers, given that I work in a singular office and that I am very isolated from our nearest regional office, I feel that I miss out on a lot of training opportunities or cultural connection opportunities that might be offered to other professional.

One participant who works in a remote community noted that

Unfortunately I don’t think we do a lot of cultural awareness training in our ministry. I think it’s kept to local offices and depending where you are at in different parts of British Columbia you may get trained for some different cultural stuff, but not enough. I don’t think we do enough training.

In terms of motivation and commitment, another participant stated

I am as committed as I need to be, I am a very practical person so if I have come across something either in my practice at work that I need to get better so if I am coming across some cultural barriers that I need to get more awareness around, I will do that piece, I am committed to that if it’s affecting my life. I am committed to it as long as I need to be. I am not going to do it for interest, am too busy.

The above five latent themes derived from the interviewing of six practicing child protection workers underscore the need for incessant collaborative pursuit of cultural competency in northern British Columbia. If adopted by all stakeholders, the findings from this study can go a long way in improving services for children and families.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of Findings

The findings, as well as various framework examples included in this study, may be invaluable to child protection social workers, who need to adhere to culturally competent practice. A concerted effort by a number of stakeholders may be required to improve the current level of cultural competency in the region’s child protection service. The stakeholders include social workers, educators, organizations (MCFD), professional associations, regulatory bodies, and policy makers.

Social Validity

In regard to social validity, it is hoped that these findings will improve or enhance the cultural competency of child protection social workers and policy makers. According to Morrow (2005), social validity refers to the social value or importance of the topic and of the research study to the profession and to society at large. It is hoped that the research findings will empower child protection intake workers with more knowledge on how to equitably serve and work with people of diverse cultures, considering the importance of cultural relativism. Cultural relativism contends that no specific culture is superior, better or more correct than another, adding that each culture has value in itself (Reichert, 2006). By understanding and accepting this concept, social workers will place themselves in positions where they can learn about other world views and become creative in their work with clients from diverse backgrounds (Lie & Este, 1999).

Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice

This study’s research question seeks some form of indicators of cultural competency among child protection intake workers. Although it may be difficult or even unrealistic to
measure cultural competency, developing some form of qualitative indicators would help shed light on organizations’ cultural competency levels. Determining the level of cultural competency is a complicated process which relies on indicators that vary from one employment setting to another. A number of researchers have proposed several different indicators, most of which are meant for healthcare practitioners but could also be applicable to social work. Some researchers have alluded that it is not only crucial for practitioners to understand the importance of cultural competency, but they should also appreciate its indicators. Purposes for seeking indicators of cultural competency may include helping practitioners choose effective and appropriate intervention strategies, holding practitioners accountable for their professional behaviour, and holding organizations accountable for the services that they provide (Geron, 2002). Examples of cultural competency indicators can be found on page 36 of this study.

Limitations of the Study

Regardless of their employment by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, participants were not bound to answering interview questions in any order or fashion. To address this concern, appropriate interview questions and subsequent follow-up questions were carefully used.

Secondly, all the participants were employees of the Ministry of Children and Family Development and some may have had reservations when answering questions that might be critical of their employer. I had to address the issue by emphasizing a commitment to adhere to strict confidentiality of all participants and their contributions.

The third limitation was that I work for the same organization from which the interviewees were recruited; hence the possibility of confidentiality concerns.
participants may have had reservations providing information critical of their employer, or themselves regardless of their willingness to participate in the study.

Finally, by prompting participants to think about cultural competency and providing them with the questions in advance, I may have influenced them to look at their practice in a particular way. Given the complexity of the interview questions, the researcher allowed the participants time for reflection in preparation for the interview. However, by using probing follow-up questions, the researcher managed to gather invaluable information such as the lack of adequate cultural competency knowledge base among some of the participants.

**What Can Be Done?**

Successful pursuit of culturally competent child protection practice requires concerted efforts by various stakeholders which include but are not limited to child protection workers, organizations (employees), educators, professional associations, regulatory bodies, and policy makers. A brief account of possible redress options is outlined below.

**Social Workers**

During their initial contact with families, child protection intake workers, as the frontline workers, determine the nature of their organization’s future collaboration with the families. Therefore, appropriate cultural competency skills are required to help build relationships between the workers and families. Participants in this study expressed their wish for more training opportunities to encourage their pursuit of cultural competency. Individual child protection workers may benefit from adapting certain change strategies. Although the majority of the participants were passionate about the pursuit of culturally competent practice, they did not have a clear approach to culturally appropriate practice. McPhatter (2003) proposes that child protection workers should increase their awareness and
understanding about the effect of culturally ineffective practice on clients and workers; acknowledge the need for culturally effective practice by assessing their own levels of practice with diverse clients; clearly commit to become culturally competent by exploring their own values around cultural diversity; and last but not least, get involved in educational activities, discussions on diversity, seminars, and research

**Educators**

Participants in this study reflected on their college education as having been inadequate in providing appropriate preparatory cultural sensitivity training. This study has attempted to address the need for proper training and mentorship for students who choose to take on a Child Protection career. According to Alaggia and Marziah, as cited in Al-Krenawi and Graham (2003), curricular changes across social work programs in Canada throughout the 1980s expanded theoretical practice models beyond a Eurocentric perspective, to advance the teaching of cross-cultural practice. As a result, competency standards for professional practice were proposed in many Canadian jurisdictions. However, “the adoption of the standards has been slow, owing to the proliferation of multiple definitions of efficient and effective culturally competent practice” (p. 155). An example of an attempt to articulate the minimum standards for culturally sensitive practice is the Canadian Association of Social Workers’ (CASW) Code of Ethics, which was revised in 2005. The majority of participants in this study, most of whom graduated from colleges in northern British Columbia, pointed to the lack of adequate cultural studies preparatory courses in the region’s social work programs.
Organizations

The Ministry of Children and Family Development is responsible for the child protection services, with the exception of the recently delegated Aboriginal child welfare agencies. Whilst one of the objectives of this study is to promote the understanding of child protection workers’ cultural competency, development of reliable and appropriate processes rest on the child welfare agencies and organizations. Participants in this study pointed to lack of or limited MCFD initiatives towards culturally sensitizing its employees, especially the social workers. Examples provided by the participants included lack of clear guidelines on cultural practice within the MCFD, and over emphasis on Aboriginal cultural issues with limited cultural training for those from other cultures who work with Aboriginal communities.

In general, and more so historically, the child protection field has had a tendency to blame parents instead of engaging them as a resource for positive change. Our passion about child safety is admirable, but the resulting tendency to rescue children makes us vulnerable to becoming excessively negative to families. This phenomenon is magnified when families are of a culture that can be perceived as a risk to the child. Our belief is that the child welfare offers something superior — a better life or a more hopeful future. History would indicate that we cannot be so sure (Blackstock et al, 2006, pp 13–14).

To advance cultural competency, MCFD might adopt the following strategies:

Emphasize that cultural competency is for everyone and not only for the front line child protection intake workers. This will ensure that the families served by the organization will receive culturally appropriate services from all employees, which in effect complement the rapport built by child protection intake workers. By involving all employees in the pursuit of culturally competent service, the invaluable goal of achieving customer-driven service can be achieved.
Secondly, encourage workers to improve their cultural competency levels by providing ongoing in-service training and workshops to ensure advancement of appropriate services as part of the overall organizational goal of excellence.

Thirdly, there is a need to promote leadership throughout the organization, especially with the crisis-prone nature of child welfare services. Child protection intake workers require culturally appropriate leadership to help them manage complicated and sometimes stressful tasks.

Leaders who value cultural competence create a climate for excellence, provide a safe environment for the discussion of differences and constructive exchange of ideas and information, inspire and motivate people to achieve and excel, are able to take risks with comfort, believe that customer service, both internally and externally, are important factors in a healthy organization, and believe that change is inevitable and should be embraced and encouraged (Nash, 1999, p. 17).

For example, a participant in this study observed that, although she/he supported interagency meetings, the supervisor decided they had to be discontinued because there was too much gossip, which led to a lot of tension between two agencies. The meetings were found to be too time consuming and they were discontinued.

All of the above factors call for specialized and ongoing culturally appropriate supervisory training. In conclusion, Nash (1999, p. 12) notes that “Culturally competent agencies are more effective, because they design programs, policies and procedures that are sensitive and effective in meeting the needs of the population served in a manner that is most beneficial and acceptable to that population.”

Professional Associations

Participants in this study were somewhat reluctant or unsure of how to put pressure on their employer (MCFD) since they (participants) did not provide strategies. I do propose
that, although the College of Social Work formulates, reviews, and promotes regulations for social workers, the British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) should continue advocating for timely changes by pressuring the Provincial Government to effect regulatory changes. Despite the enactment of the new Social Work Act on November 18, 2008, the long sought mandatory registration of social workers has yet to become a reality (Nash, 2009) Most recently, on August 11, 2010, the president of BCASW reiterated the importance of implementing mandatory registration. BCASW should continue to put pressure on the BC government to realize this goal. The registration of social workers would, among other things, hold both employers and employees accountable to the services that they provide, and would ensure that the yearly renewal of each of the social workers’ certification meets an agreeable competitive criterion. A requirement (test) for a higher level of cultural competency can be part of certification criteria.

**Regulatory Bodies**

Although there has been tremendous improvement in how the courts handle child protection cases, consistency in the provision of legal aid and the need for more unified court services are some of the areas that require further attention. Legal aid for child protection cases should not remain at the mercy of consecutive provincial governments. MacDonald (2006) addressed the issue of legal aid for children in protection proceedings and proposed a review of court-based and out of court proceedings to ensure that no child is denied legal aid. The author also addressed the need for a unified family court that would ensure that cases involving children in the Child, Family and Community Service Act, Family Relations Act (1996), and the Federal Divorce Act (1985) are dealt with promptly. Harmonization of child protection legal issues in the form of a unified court will ease the inclusion of the culturally
appropriate alternative dispute resolution measures, such as mediation and family group conferences. Consequently, child protection workers will have concurrent opportunities for working collaboratively with all the parties, which will likely reduce the recurrent cases of child maltreatment. Three of the participants in this study spoke of the complexity of incorporating culturally appropriate services when dealing with various laws and jurisdictions. One of the examples provided was that of assisting Aboriginal families who are transient between Reserves and Urban areas.

**Policy Makers**

Successful delivery of culturally appropriate service is dependent on the appropriateness of internal policies and procedures. According to Nash (1999), training for frontline child protection workers and their supervisors is not enough if the rest of the organization is culturally incompetent. Therefore, the ultimate goal is to ensure that appropriate training is provided to all staff members. Secondly, flexibility in program development should be a major consideration. Program administration should be responsive to the needs of the population served and should be reviewed from time to time. Also, consideration of internal and external feedback helps in making amendments where necessary. Feedback from both the child protection intake workers and the families that they serve is paramount in the formulation and implementation of new policies.

Changes towards culturally appropriate policies require an action plan that involves realistic timelines and effective communication. Staff from all levels should be included in the process, and those not normally in leadership roles should have roles in the development, design, and implementation of parts of the process. Some participants in this study voiced concerns about a lack of consistency in staff and interagency meetings that would encourage
information sharing. Any action plan to address the dilemmas facing an organization should have doable tasks and realistic timelines. Finally, it is always important to remember that, although change is sometimes painful and difficult in organizations, without change there can never be growth (Nash, 1999)

Future Research

In terms of possibilities for future research, this study has demonstrated the need for re-evaluation of cultural competency training and practice for child protection social workers in Northern British Columbia. The result of this study leads this researcher to question how quality assurance of culturally appropriate children and family services can be evaluated. In other words, it would be important to find out how service recipients perceive social workers in Northern British Columbia. Perhaps a study involving a large sample of clients, with confidentiality assurance, may help reveal how clients perceive their social workers’ cultural competency. Also, there is a need for a study on how modern technology, including the invaluable Internet, can be used to raise cultural awareness, with the aim to culturally sensitize social workers.

Conclusion

The information derived from this study has broadened my knowledge of cultural competency. As a child protection social worker, I chose this study because I wanted not only to advance my understanding of culturally appropriate child welfare practice, but also to provide an insight into the state of cultural competency among child protection social workers. To that end, I have outlined, among other things, my personal experiences as a child protection social worker, a thematic framework for northern British Columbia child
Cultural competency is, for the most part, a change of attitude and it is infinite. Although we all have enough opportunities to change or improve our attitudes in our lifetime, we do not have the luxury to wait any longer, therefore, the time to start is now.
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Appendix A: Research and Ethics Board Application

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<tr>
<th>Researchers’ Name &amp; Signature</th>
<th>Anthony Muturi Karuuki</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete Address</td>
<td>3690 Gould Crescent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prince George BC V2N 4C3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone No</td>
<td>250 612 5163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kanukia@unbc.ca">kanukia@unbc.ca</a></td>
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Supervisor’s Name & Signature (if Researcher is a student)

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<tr>
<th>Name &amp; Position (Print)</th>
<th>Dr Glen Schmidt, Professor of Social Work</th>
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Program

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Title of Project

| Cultural Competency, Child Protection Intake Workers, and Northern British Columbia Experiences |

Type of Project

[ ] Class Project (Class projects are normally reviewed by professors after a protocol has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board)

[ x ] Thesis

[ ] Faculty Research
Source of Funding (if any)

N/A

Is this project a replication of an earlier project or protocol that received ethics approval?

[ ] Yes  (Attach copy of the Certificate or letter and submit to the REB  Please clarify (on a separate sheet) if there are any changes being made to the previously approved proposal or if the proposals are identical)

[ x ] No  (Go to Question 10)

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the cultural awareness of child protection intake workers in their work with culturally diverse communities. It is hoped that once the result of this research is analyzed and published, it will contribute to the creation of new or additional cultural appropriate policy guidelines for current and future child protection workers in Northern British Columbia.

Project Dates

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Expected Start Date</th>
<th>Dec 12, 2009</th>
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<tr>
<td>Expected Completion Date</td>
<td>March 30, 2010</td>
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Does this project require any physically invasive procedures (e.g., blood tests), potentially harmful physical regimes (e.g., special dieting) or potentially harmful psychological or social experiments (e.g., illusory perception tests)?

[ ] Yes
[ x ] No

Summary of Methods  In the text box below give us a brief summary. Sufficient information must be given to assess the degree of risk to participants

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<th>Theoretical Perspective</th>
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<td>This research study will be guided by an interpretive perspective hence the use of a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative research is described by Creswell (1998) as an inquiry process based on distinct methodological traditions that explore social situations or human problems.</td>
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In this qualitative study, the writer will use a content analysis approach because it will help to describe and explain the experiences of individual Child protection intake workers in northern British Columbia. Content analysis is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data which identifies common themes in the text provided for analysis.

Data Collection

The method of data collection will be by telephone interviews. Kvale (1996) describes interview as a stage which knowledge is constructed through interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee roles.
It is hoped that this researcher will easily identify the interview participants since there are many social workers in Northern British Columbia. The researcher has so far identified with help from his social work colleagues some potential subjects who have indicated willingness to take part in this research.

The research will seek to interview 6 participants, all of whom will be intake social workers employed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. All the participants will have a minimum of three years working experience.

The researcher will send letters of consent to the participants after confirming that they meet the required criteria.

The interview will be semi-structured meaning that it will have the sequence of themes to be covered as well as suggested open-ended questions for which the subject is asked to provide his or her own answer and allow for in-depth probes.

The interviews will be conducted by telephone and a tape recorder will be used to record the 1 1/2 hour interviews.

The names of the interviewees and any identifying information will be masked to ensure confidentiality.

After transcription is complete, the data will be kept in a safe locked cabinet in my house which will only be accessible by me, until the research is complete. After one year the transcripts of the participants will be destroyed through a recognized and bonded agency that shreds private information.

Immediately after the interview, I will debrief with each participant and discuss how the interview experience was.
At the closure of the interview, the subjects will be provided with contacts for counseling services in case they needed further debriefing.

Please append a complete copy of the research project proposal, including any interview protocols or questionnaires.

Attachments:

- [x] Research Project Proposal
- [x] Interview Protocols
- [ ] Questionnaires

How will participants be recruited? In the text box below give us a brief summary.

The participants will be recruited through a snowball, purposive sampling method which is a non-probability sampling method. The researcher will request colleagues in the social work field from the Ministry of Children and Family Development to identify qualified prospective participants in Northern British Columbia. Among the respondents, 6 participants will be identified and recruited. Those who will be recruited will be expected to have a minimum of Bachelor of Social work degree.

Will participants be competent to give consent?

- [x] Yes (Go to Question 17)
- [ ] No (e.g., Children and cognitively impaired people) How will the issue of consent be addressed? In the text box below give us a brief summary.
All the participants will be over 19 years old

Will participants be compensated?

[  ] Yes  How?

[ x ] No  (Go to Question 18)

In the text box below give us a brief summary

Will consent be obtained from each participant either in writing or recorded?

[ x ] Yes  Please attach a copy of the Consent Form or the questions/statements to be recorded. Each participant must receive one copy of the signed consent form at the time of signing

[  ] No  Please attach information which will be provided to participants and/or participant communities

Note. Checklist of items to be addressed in your Information Sheet or Consent Form is provided at the end of this Approval Form

Does the project involve any deception?

[  ] Yes  Justify the use of deception and indicate how disclosure finally will be addressed

[ x ] No  (Go to Question 20)
What is your plan for feedback to participants? How do you propose to distribute results to participants?

A copy of the research output will be provided to each participant and their employer at the end of the study. The results will be distributed to the participants through their employer in a confidential and registered mail.

Will the research participants be from an institutional population, e.g., company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, etc?

[ x ] Yes (Go to Question 22)

[ ] No (Go to Question 23)

If the answer to Question 21 is yes, attach a letter of consent for access from the institution, e.g., company, agency, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, etc.

[ x ] Letter(s) of Consent attached

Will the research participants be participating as representatives of, or on behalf of, an Aboriginal group?

[ ] Yes Attach letter of consent from appropriate authority, e.g., Band Council, etc

[ x ] No Go to Question 24)
Does this project require any other ethical approval, e.g. Northern Health Authority (Attach Schedule D), other Hospital, First Nations Band, etc.? If so, please ensure that all guidelines are followed

[  ] Yes Please specify the agency ___ and attach letter of consent/ethical approval from the appropriate authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry of Children and Family Development</th>
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[  ] Letter(s) of Consent attached

[ x ] No
Appendix B: UNBC Research Ethics Board Memo

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

MEMORANDUM

To: Anthony Kanuki
CC: Glen Schmidt

From: Henry Harder, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: December 17, 2009

Re: E2009.1201.202
Cultural Competency, Child Protection Intake Workers and Northern BC Experiences

Thank you for submitting the above-noted proposal and requested amendments to the Research Ethics Board. Your proposal has been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the Research Ethics Board.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Henry Harder
Appendix C: Information Letter

Researcher: Anthony Kariuki, BSW

Email: kariukia@unbc.ca

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Glen Schmidt

Thesis Title: Cultural Competency, Child Protection Intake Workers, and Northern British Columbia Experiences.

Dear Participant,

I do invite you to participate in a research study entitled Cultural Competency, Child Protection Intake Workers, and Northern British Columbia Experiences. The research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work from the University of Northern British Columbia.

Purpose of my research: The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of child protection social workers in their work with culturally diverse communities. I wish to explore how these experiences unfolded for you (the participant) and the response and/or reaction that you have encountered from the members of the communities that you serve.

It is my hope that once the result of this research is analyzed and published, it might contribute to the creation of new or additional cultural appropriate policies guidelines for current and future child protection workers in Northern British Columbia.
The potential benefits and risks. A benefit to interviewees will be the opportunity to share your experience of working with diverse cultural clientele in your own voice. This is consistent with social work’s spirit of selfless contribution and awareness rising for the common good in society. By sharing your experiences and reading the experiences of other interviewees, you will be exposed to other cultural awareness practices which may be helpful in enhancing your career. A risk is that the discussion may bring unpleasant realization about your practice not previously considered. If such a situation arises, and you feel emotionally upset, and require clinical de-briefing, please refer to the contact sheet I have provided for numbers of counselors in your region. Also please be advised that you can withdraw from the research at any time.

Why you are chosen. With the help and permission of your employer Ministry of Children and Family Development you were invited to participate in this study. You positively and confidentially responded and I made arrangements for you to participate. No one other than you and I know your name or employing agency because as for the most part, all our communications have been via email correspondence (or telephone) and no face-to-face meetings are anticipated. You were willing to be interviewed using the telephone format, and this is largely what prompted you to agree because it did not require you to leave your office or home.

What you will be asked. You will be one of (at least) six social workers to participate in a telephone interview. You will be asked to answer 10 questions that I have carefully
developed. You are encouraged to discuss and share as openly and as comfortable, your experiences working with culturally diverse clientele.

Individuals that will have access to your responses: Myself (researcher), Professor Glen Schmidt (thesis supervisor), Professor Joanna Pierce (internal committee member), Professor Linda O’Neill (external committee member), and possibly an editor, not yet determined.

Voluntary nature of participation: Participation in the research is absolutely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at anytime without any consequence.

Remuneration for participating: Not applicable.

How anonymity will be maintained: The names of the interviewees will be masked to ensure anonymity, and any identifying information in the transcript will be removed before the analysis.

Confidentiality: All the interviewees will be social workers, they will therefore be requested to refer to BCASW Code of Ethics Handbook which I will adhere to, in this research.

How the information will be stored, for how long and how it will be destroyed: The data and the audio tapes will be kept in a safe locked cabinet in my house until the completion of the research. The locked cabinet will only be accessible by me. One year following successful...
thesis defense, all transcripts, any correspondence between the researcher and the interviewees as well as the audio tapes will be destroyed. The researcher will ensure that destroying of the research material will be carried out by a recognized and bonded professional agency that shreds private information and appropriately disposes audio tapes.

How to get a copy of the research Participants who may want to receive the final copy of this research can contact the researcher approximately seven months from the date of the interview.

Contact person Any questions about this project should be directed to me using the contact information provided above.

Complaints about the project Any complaint that may arise about the project should be directed to the office of Research, (reb@unbc.ca or 250 960 5650).

Definition of Cultural Competency

Cultural competency embraces the importance of culture, the assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, the expansion of cultural knowledge, and the adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs (Cross et al., 1989, p. 13, as cited in Kufeldt and McKenzie, Eds., 2003). Due to numerous conceptual definitions of cultural competency and other related constructs such as cross-cultural competency and ethnic sensitive practice, cultural competency for the purpose of this research will refer to
The process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, race, ethnic backgrounds, religious, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each National Association of Social Workers (NASW), (2001).

Thank you, for your potential willingness to participate and answer questions pertaining to the above research.
Appendix D: Consent to Participate

I, ____________________________, agree to participate in the outlined research project. I understand that my name will not be revealed. In addition, the name of my community will also be kept confidential. Upon completion of the recorded interview, the data will be analyzed and all tapes destroyed. I understand that the goal of this research is to encourage culturally appropriate approach to child protection work. I also understand that I may choose to end my participation at any time.

Signed by, ____________________________ (participant)

Phone #, ____________________________

Researcher, ____________________________

Date ____________________________

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

If you have any further questions regarding this research please direct your question to the Vice President Research, University of Northern British Columbia, Phone # 250 960 5820.
Appendix E: Interview Questions

From the notes I have been taking using Mauch and Park’s (2003, p. 240) organization for writing strategies I have come up with the following interview questions

1. What aspects of your ethnic or cultural background are relevant to social work?

2. Personal culture (also called core identity) consists of the entirety of an individual’s personal meaning system, beliefs, values, perceptions, assumptions, and explanatory frameworks about reality. Tell me about an incident when you encountered a challenge to your personal culture.

3. Social workers in general sometimes experience cultural dilemmas (uncertainties) in their practice, can you recall any dilemmas that you have experienced?

4. What personal verbal and nonverbal barriers to effective communication are social workers likely to experience when working with culturally diverse clientele?

5. Tell me some of the most common cultural competencies for maintaining effective communication and relationships with culturally diverse clientele that often come up among your colleagues.

6. What is your commitment to becoming culturally competent?

7. How much time do you spend engaging in cross-cultural professional exchanges with your colleagues?

8. Can you describe the best cross cultural moments you have had with a client?

9. Social workers sometimes engage with appropriate mediators when working with culturally diverse clientele. How helpful has the latter been to you as a child protection social worker?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of culture?
## Appendix F: The Organizational Cultural Competence Change Model

### A. Organizational Change Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Stage &amp; Goal</th>
<th>Implementation Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Precontemplation</strong></td>
<td>Increase agency leaders’ awareness of issues related to culturally competent organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educate decision makers on role of culture in organization, services, and client population</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Commit resources to begin process</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contemplation</strong></td>
<td>Understand how cultural competence affects the agency and developmental nature of cultural competence attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarify conceptual and practical meaning of cultural competence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce change process model</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explore cost/benefit of culturally competent organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Develop organizational plan for achieving cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revisit policies/procedures to reflect cultural competence goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appoint key leader to oversee plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Establish work groups to structure organizational activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assess organization’s diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop plan for community outreach</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create multicultural physical environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop training plan for all staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td>Implement observable activities with cultural competence goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make organization’s mission, policies, procedures reflect goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete self-assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Put committee structure in place</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allocate fiscal resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop evaluation tools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Initiate community-building activities with diverse population</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assess workforce diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Put long-term training plan in place</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Engage activities to solidify change process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use cultural competence consultants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initiate a system of reinforcement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporate human and fiscal resources for cultural competence into agency standard operations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipate obstacles to goal achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevent a relapse to culturally ineffective service delivery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## B. Interprofessional Change Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Stage &amp; Goal</th>
<th>Implementation Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Precontemplation</strong></td>
<td>Open a dialogue in an environment of safety with colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase awareness of the need for</td>
<td>Explore how culture affects workers, clients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culturally competent services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contemplation</strong></td>
<td>Continue a nondefensive dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand and acknowledge</td>
<td>Acknowledge professional role in problem resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seriousness and value of culturally</td>
<td>Assess where participants are in the change process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competent practice and change process model</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Continue open, honest dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make collective commitment to</td>
<td>Clarify conceptual and practical meaning of cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>become culturally competent</td>
<td>Institute format for meetings on cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish support network with diverse internal and external colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td>Participate in education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institute behavioral indicators that</td>
<td>Participate in competence committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lead to achievement of cultural</td>
<td>Provide mutual support and constructive feedback to colleagues who facilitate goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competence goals</td>
<td>achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide leadership and accountability on cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model culturally competent service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evaluate progress toward goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Explore potential impasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support and enhance organizational</td>
<td>Advocate, problem solve, and use change agent role to achieve cultural competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and individual practitioners' efforts</td>
<td>Take a leadership role in process</td>
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<tr>
<td>toward cultural competence</td>
<td>Recognize, reward, and support colleagues</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## B. Individual Change Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Stage &amp; Goal</th>
<th>Implementation Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Precontemplation</strong> Increase awareness and understanding about the effect of culturally ineffective practice on clients and workers</td>
<td>Explore the role of culture in service delivery Acquire research-based information on culturally competent practice Identify issues related to culturally competent practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contemplation</strong> Acknowledge need for culturally effective practice</td>
<td>Assess own level of practice effectiveness with diverse clients Examine own racial, ethnic, social identity Explore effect of culturally incompetent practice on diverse populations Identify voids in knowledge Explore avenues for filling voids in practice effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong> Clearly state intention to become culturally competent Commit to becoming culturally competent</td>
<td>Explore own values about cultural diversity Explore own socialization related to beliefs about racially, culturally, ethnically diverse other Develop individual education plan for acquiring multicultural practice skills Establish support network, consultation on cultural competence, and ongoing supervision Institute process for self-care Develop outreach plan to connect with community leaders and cultural guides Increase awareness about own responses to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong> Institute behavioral indicators of cultural competence</td>
<td>Initiate education activities, discussions on diversity, seminars, research, and study Expand connections with diverse colleagues and community-based organizations that reflect population Establish expert consultation and supervision Establish mechanism for professional accountability with colleagues regarding diversity issues Assess cultural competence plan relative to own practice effectiveness Engage in self-care activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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continued
**Maintenance**
Implement systems of reinforcement to solidify behaviorally oriented culturally effective practice

- Identify situational and personal factors that impede competence attainment
- Assess emotional reactions to cultural competence goals and barriers
- Evaluate behavioral responses to cultural competence goals
- Engage in productive problem resolution when barriers surface
- Assess progress in working with diverse colleagues and clients