

Reflective Essay

Narshini Chuckowry

Before coming to Canada, I rarely questioned how deeply culture shapes the way people communicate. In Mauritius, most of my daily interactions took place among people who shared similar assumptions about how to speak, respond, disagree, and manage time. I grew up using direct communication style, and I expected people to reply in the same way. My sense of time was also flexible, and it was normal for events to begin later than scheduled without causing concern. When I began my studies at Thompson Rivers University (TRU), I quickly realized that not everyone approached communication or time in the same way. Some people preferred indirect expressions and relied on hints rather than straightforward answers, and many placed strong importance on punctuality. These early differences made me realize that the norms I grew up with were not universal and that I would need to adjust in order to communicate effectively across cultures.

As I became involved in group assignments, these differences became even more noticeable. Some classmates liked to discuss ideas slowly and reflect before giving an opinion, while others replied quickly and wanted decisions made right away. Silence could mean disagreement, politeness, or simply thinking, and I often found it difficult to interpret the intention behind it. There were moments when I misread someone's indirect feedback or misjudged their sense of urgency. These situations challenged my habit of expecting straightforward answers and taught me to slow down, ask clarifying questions, and avoid making assumptions. These academic experiences helped me recognize that communication is not only about expressing my thoughts but also about understanding the expectations and comfort level of others.

My volunteer role at the English Language Learning Centre strengthened the skills I was developing. Supporting learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds required a great deal of patience and adaptability. I learned to adjust the pace of my speech, simplify explanations when needed, and pay closer attention to nonverbal cues. The learners often communicated in ways shaped by their own cultural expectations, and I became more aware of how confidence, hesitation, or silence can be influenced by cultural norms. Working at the centre allowed me to connect with people who were experiencing many of the same challenges I faced when adjusting to Canadian communication styles, and this made me more empathetic and intentional about creating inclusive learning spaces.

My involvement with Kamloops Rotaract gave me another opportunity to practice and deepen these skills. Volunteering with a diverse group mean navigating different

expectations for leadership, collaboration, and conflict resolution. Some members preferred long group discussions before making decisions, while others focused on efficiency and wanted quick conclusions. I learned to balance these preferences by listening carefully, acknowledging quieter voices, and guiding conversations so that everyone felt included. These experiences showed me that intercultural communication is not only about avoiding misunderstandings but also about building trust and creating a shared sense of purpose in multicultural settings.

The TRUSU Ouispeak French Club and Café Jasette also played an important role in my growth. Since joining the club from its beginning and participating in Café Jasette starting in March, I have helped facilitate conversations where students practice French while sharing parts of their cultural identities. Each session brings participants with different comfort levels in speaking, listening, and expressing themselves. Some blend languages while others rely on gestures or storytelling rooted in their cultural backgrounds. Encouraging these diverse contributions helped me develop the ability to guide conversations gently and support various communication styles. These experiences allowed me to see how language learning naturally connects to cultural exchange and how meaningful it is to create spaces where people can express themselves without fear of being misunderstood.

Through all these experiences, I have developed a clearer understanding of how culture influences the way people communicate. I learned that what seems natural or normal to me may feel unfamiliar to someone else and that misunderstanding often comes from different cultural expectations rather than personal conflict. These insights have helped me approach conversations with more curiosity and patience. I now pay more attention to tone, pacing, indirect cues, and different interpretations of time. This shift has made me more aware of the complexity of global interactions and more confident in navigating them.

This learning is important because communication is central to both academic and professional environments. As I continue my studies in data science, I know I will work with people from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The ability to adapt, listen actively, and respect different ways of expressing ideas will help me collaborate more effectively and ethically. Beyond my career, these skills will shape how I engage with communities, friendships and global opportunities. Through my experiences at TRU, I have become more aware, more flexible, and better prepared to interact meaningfully in an interconnected world.