

CLD Corner—Reflections on Developing Cultural Competence: A Bilingual SLP Assistant/Graduate Student's Personal Journey

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The CLD Corner was created in an effort to provide information and respond to questions on cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD). Questions are answered by members of the TSHA Committee on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity. Members for the 2018-2019 school year include **Raul F. Prezas**, PhD, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Phuong Lien Palafox**, MS, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Mary Bauman-Forkner**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Alisa Baron**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Judy Martinez Villarreal**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Irmgard Payne**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Lisa Rukovena**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Mirza J. Lugo-Neris**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Andrea Hughes**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Isabel Garcia-Fullana**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Maria Resendiz**, PhD, CCC-SLP; and **Amy Leal Truong**, BS, graduate student member. Please submit your questions to TSHACLD@gmail.com and look for responses from the CLD Committee on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

As part of my graduate school curriculum with Texas Woman's University Distance Venue program, I was supervised by Lisa Carver, a bilingual speech-language pathologist (SLP) who has practiced in the public school setting for 12 years. Lisa was my supervisor at a Fort Worth Independent School District program, "Ranitas en El Campo", that collaborates with first-year bilingual graduate student clinicians from Texas Christian University and preschool children with communication disorders whose primary language is Spanish. Although I have been practicing as a bilingual SLP Assistant for five years since graduating from Stephen F. Austin State University, it was during my time at "Ranitas en El Campo" that I observed personal growth toward my own clinical competence when providing services to culturally and linguistically diverse populations. That experience has changed the way I approach planning therapy sessions, selecting materials, and choosing themes. I hope that my experiences, reflections, and observations also can inspire the paths of other clinicians on their own personal journeys toward clinical competence.

Importance of Cultural Factors

Recognizing cultural factors that may impact communication and service delivery is a critical area of competency that a bilingual speech-language pathologist should demonstrate when working with CLD populations. In fact, bilingual and monolingual SLPs, SLP Assistants, and student clinicians are each on individual journeys toward cultural competence based on the experiences that each has had while interacting with individuals from CLD backgrounds. To ensure the most effective therapy, it is important to consider our students' backgrounds and socioeconomic status. For more information on the culture of poverty, communication, and CLD families, please refer to [this article](#) in the June 2016 issue of the *Communicologist*.

Cultural Competence Impacts Intervention

Cultural competence supports effective intervention. The selection of therapy materials and planning activities is the area where the clinician has the most control and can be one of the most important variables when it comes to serving clients from a CLD background. Choosing materials that are both physically available and culturally accessible can help encourage parents to utilize materials available in the home and community and allows parents to replay an experience from therapy with their child. This increases parental use of facilitative communication strategies and ultimately improves opportunities for the client's progress. It should not come as a surprise that "materials sensitive to the culture of the treated individuals have the potential of affecting the results of the intervention" (Goral & Conner, 2013). Using items and materials that represent the culture of the family show that the child's world is valued and their identity as an individual is welcomed.

This past school year, as we worked with Hispanic populations during the “Ranitas” parent training sessions (eight one-hour sessions in groups of four children plus their caregivers and siblings), we noted improved performance in students whose parents participated with carry-over therapy activities at home. I observed that books were often used as an effective medium to introduce themes, and the books selected had familiar universal themes such as seasons, families, and foods. Although there are many fun ideas on websites like Pinterest that use specialty products (such as fondant icing and food additives), we often were purposeful to adapt and make sure we purchased food items and materials from familiar stores, such as Walmart or Fiesta, in order to increase the parents’ ability to localize items and make it easy to replicate an activity. Moreover, we identified household items parents can recycle at home to help expand their child’s vocabulary and increase the child’s opportunities to communicate wants and needs, such as creating materials using egg cartons for matching games, using toilet paper tubes for practicing articulation and vocalizations, or using paper sacks to recreate a bird’s nest. Our themes often were connected by music, and parents showed interest in recalling and rediscovering familiar songs/books by Hispanic poets and authors (we used the version of “Los Pollitos” from the book *De colores* by Jose Luis Orozco). Parents were often motivated to search for those books at their local libraries. Some siblings in attendance were primarily English speakers; therefore, we took advantage of selecting popular bilingual books (such as *Si Llevas un Raton al Cine/ If You Take a Mouse to the Movies* by Laura Numeroff), and we also utilized the search feature on the Bilingual website (www.bilingualists.com) to browse books by theme and language targets. Furthermore, we encouraged parents to attend story time in Spanish at their local library by providing them a list of libraries near their home.

Readings/performances on internet sites such as YouTube also were presented and then re-enacted (“La Canción de las Frutas” by Patti Lozano was a favorite) by the groups using dramatic play with props in order to target familiar verbs and vocabulary. We sent home printed lyrics of the songs and mini-books of the stories made from paper sacks. After the parents and children had experienced practicing songs or stories together, we were able to demonstrate communication techniques with the parents such as how to use cloze opportunities and wait time to facilitate their child’s best communication skills. I noticed parental participation increased as the parents engaged at home with their children, but most importantly, children began to recall previously presented information and use the new vocabulary.

ASHA and Cultural Competence

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), “Developing cultural competence is a dynamic and complex process requiring ongoing self-assessment and continuous expansion of one’s cultural knowledge” (ASHA, 2017). With the increasing number of Hispanic students in the public schools, the way we relate to these children and include their families in the therapeutic process plays a huge role in their success and generalization. In a recent 2017 demographic profile of ASHA members, only 6% met ASHA’s definition of bilingual service provider, with 7,221 SLPs providing services in Spanish. With this in mind, there are many monolingual clinicians serving CLD clients in many languages, and improved cultural competence when planning activities and selecting materials is one of the best ways that a therapist can facilitate support and progress for their clients.

Considerations to Improve Cultural Competence

As a new school year begins, we encourage you to take these steps in improving your own cultural competence with your families that have cultural and linguistically different backgrounds:

1. Reflect on how you are doing on your journey toward cultural competence by completing the self-assessments on the ASHA website using the interactive tool (<https://www.asha.org/practice/multicultural/self/>) or by using the checklist documents (<https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/Cultural-Competence-Checklist-Personal-Reflection.pdf>; <https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/Cultural-Competence-Checklist-Policies->

Procedures.pdf; <https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/Cultural-Competence-Checklist-Service-Delivery.pdf>).

2. Be honest with yourself in identifying areas in which you could improve and serve your clients better. Choose an area that you feel least comfortable in and seek information and training.
3. Try to select products and resources already available in your community that represent the cultures and linguistic populations you serve. Using resources within the home and community allows clients to see that their cultural heritage, traditions, and customs are valued. This will help parents envision and facilitate the progress we are hoping to achieve.

*This article is a collaboration between **Lisa Carver**, MS, CCC-SLP, and **Amy Leal Truong**, BS, SLP Assistant, and is a summary of Amy's experiences as a first-year graduate student that made an impact on planning therapy and improving family and client participation in the therapy process.*

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