

CLD Corner: Worldview Thinking as a Way to Understand CLD Populations

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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 2017-2018 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; and **Amy Leal**, BS, SLP-Assistant (graduate student member). Please submit your questions to TSHA_CLD@gmail.com and look for responses from the CLD Committee on TSHA's website and in the Communicologist.

Recently, the CLD Committee received this question from a Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (TSHA) member:

"I have learned so much from the CLD Corner over the years but wanted to know if your committee had any advice or information about working with clients that may have different views from the SLP and how to proceed when this interferes with progress on their therapy goals. What is the best approach in order for me to provide the most effective treatment that is also culturally appropriate? Thank you in advance! Kim M."

One of the most challenging, fascinating, and rewarding aspects of our professions is the fact that we deal with people. Instead of investing our lives in enriching occupations centered on machines, manufacturing, or molecules, we are people-centered. We provide therapy to others using a wide array of tools we have acquired from education and experience.

But the word "people" seems too abstract. We deal with individuals. Possessing unique personalities, experiences, and gifts, these individuals come to us with all sorts of passions, pursuits, and pain. While our speech therapy tools can be applied cross-culturally given our shared humanity, each person is unique. Each personality is rare, inimitable, and irreplaceable. Past decisions, present circumstances, and particular context influences them; vices and virtues texture them; and anticipation of the future informs them. They long to love and be loved, to have lives of meaning, purpose, and significance, and hope for a better future.

Therefore, given their individuality, how can we provide the most effective care possible as speech-language pathologists (SLPs)? How can we best tailor our skills to meet our clients where they are in an effort to take them where they need to be? Said differently, what resources are available to assist us in creating a personalized plan of SLP therapy, promote progress, and provide best practices given who they are beyond what we already do? The answer is to know their worldview.

Not only is speech-language pathology a moral enterprise but it is also a science and an art that is individually centered. Given their uniqueness, if we can understand our clients' worldviews we will not only be able to better understand who they are but we also will be able to understand how our clients perceive all things. In fact, everyone possesses a worldview. While each client's worldview may differ greatly from one another, there is much to gain by understanding what they believe. But before we can learn our clients' worldviews, we need to first understand the nature of a worldview.

What Is a Worldview?

The word "worldview" comes from the German word "weltanschauung," meaning "intuition of the world." Interestingly, this word, first coined by philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his famous work *Critique of Judgment* (1790), was used only once by him. But following Kant's particular use of worldview, the very idea quickly emerged in the history of ideas as a way to refer to the sum-total of

one's belief, a framework of assumptions by which one perceives all things. Thus, a worldview is a set of ground-floor assumptions by which one interprets all things.

Key statements to understanding what a worldview is include (1) an interpretative framework of assumptions and presuppositions (consciously or unconsciously); (2) a comprehensive framework of beliefs by which one makes sense of everything; and (3) a habituated way of seeing and doing.

Likened to a computer operating system, a person's worldview is the most important critical component of a person's life. Why? The choices our clients make, the paths they pursue, and the goals they seek to secure are governed by the set of assumptions by which they perceive all things. In sum, one's worldview is the cause for everything else: career, education, family, friendships, goals, and purpose. How one lives their life is governed by the way they interpret the world, their surroundings, and even themselves.

How Are Worldviews Formed?

Given our ever-growing global community, rich diversity in our classrooms, hospitals, home health care, and other multicultural settings where we serve, we recognize how different people are, the disparate truth-claims they make, and the wide array of values they embrace. But what are the sources for these worldview ground-level assumptions, this conscious and unconscious conceptual framework, or interpretative lenses by which people perceive everything?

In part, these worldview beliefs are formed through exposure to entertainment (e.g., movies, music), particular aspects of culture (e.g., biculturalism, region/area of residence, religious beliefs), interpersonal relationships, (parent-to-child, peer-to-peer), and significant associations (e.g., Boy Scouts of America, sport activities, volunteer groups, university involvement, social utilities). From those relationships, worldview beliefs are embraced often informally and uncritically. In other words, we do not critically evaluate the truth-claims advocated but tend to accept them apart from careful investigation. For example, some ideas are embraced because they are attractive regardless of their truth-value. Advocated by authorities and personalities who are earnest, mesmerizing, or persuasive, truth-claims are embraced without scrutiny. Moreover, the stories proclaimed through today's technologies are significant catalysts for worldview formation. Coupled with powerful visuals, words in rhythm, striking images, and the melodies that accompany us as we participate in the process, we find ourselves affirming Marshall McLuhan and Lewis Lapham's (1994) famous thesis on *Understanding Media*, "We become what we behold." But others are embraced because one generation instructs the next generation.

But if we do ask for justification for those beliefs, many of the reasons can be categorized into four major categories, namely, sociological (e.g., family, friends, geographical location, peer pressure), psychological (e.g., personal comfort, hope, identity, meaning), spiritual (e.g., authority, faith practices, Scripture, tradition), and philosophical (e.g., internal coherence, logical consistency, pragmatic workability, explanatory power).

Yet we share a growing concern that many of the problems we are experiencing in our society are due to inadequate thinking. Thus, we lament the number of people we have encountered who are not taught to think with excellence, to read to understand, or even to display the art of thoughtful conversation. But we digress.

Worldview Thinking Is Not Just for Philosophers!

Since a person's worldview is the lens by which one perceives everything else, worldview thinking is not only valuable to philosophers but also has practical value in speech-language therapy. Why? Every client possesses a worldview. They not only perceive themselves through their personal worldview but they also interpret our assessments, instructions, and prescriptions through that same conceptual framework.

For example, when we give a certain recommendation for intervention to follow, we may face certain challenges that are connected to their worldview. Some may believe they cannot change. Others

may agree that the desire to change is present, but they are too embarrassed to receive therapy. Some may even believe they do not deserve speech therapy, or practitioners may not believe providing speech therapy aligns with their worldview. In some cases, a clash of worldviews between the client/family and SLP may exist (for more information on worldview perspectives, ethical decision-making, and honoring all perspectives, see Prezas & Shockley, 2018).

But our clients are not only interpreting our treatment because they also are interpreting each of us through their worldview. Thus, it may matter very much to the client what type of clothing you wear, the training you received, the gender you possess, and the religion you practice. While we are not required by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) to assess our clients' worldviews, when we come to understand their interpretative framework, which may be antithetical to our own, it invites a greater scope of understanding and an interaction that may assist us in providing a specific approach more effectively. Stated differently, while knowing a person's worldview is not necessary for SLP therapy, once we are able to truly understand their worldview, we will likely be in a better position to assess their specific needs, understand their concerns, create a treatment plan that is best designed to meet them where they specifically are, and build bridges of credibility that may even last a lifetime.

Know Thyself!

But we are not only concerned with specific treatment. We also are thinking about ourselves. Our clients are not the only ones who possess a worldview; we possess a worldview as well. Consequently, the way we provide treatment is shaped by our worldview. Our interpretative frameworks mold the ways in which we interact with others. This helps explain why we may differ in assessments, diagnoses, and treatment plans. Knowing our worldviews may help us as we interact with clients, administrators, institutional experts, parents, spouses, and other invested authorities.

To be sure, while diversity is to be recognized and valued, we should take time to reflectively evaluate what are worldview assumptions are. While not all worldviews possess the same explanatory power, given the type of justification (e.g., logical consistency, empirical adequacy, existential relevance, workability) used to support them, understanding who you are will only aid you in helping others. It may even be fruitful to ask people close to us what they think our ground-floor worldview assumptions are and how we have justified them.

Want to check your own cultural competence? Visit www.asha.org to learn more (ASHA, 2010a; ASHA, 2010b).

How do you view your clients/patients from CLD populations? Find out here:

<https://www.asha.org/uploadedFiles/Cultural-Competence-Checklist-Personal-Reflection.pdf>

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

Understanding a Client's Worldview

One of the greatest ways to understand a client's worldview is to break down their assumptions into eight major categories. While many people's worldviews are not coherent—that is, their assumptions may contradict each other—understanding what they believe about the following will help us see not only what they believe but also how they think. While this may be best applied to adults, it is fascinating to discover what children believe about the following eight categories as well:

- View of reality
- View of God
- View of truth
- View of knowledge

- View of humanity
- View of ethics
- View of evil
- View of beauty

To be sure, some of those assumptions have greater priority than others (e.g., God vs. beauty), and some also have more of an impact on how we interact with our clients (e.g., religious beliefs and food preparation). Further, those assumptions can change as we experience the good, the bad, and the ugly details of living life. Over time, some of those assumptions become very calcified given certain habituated ways of thinking.

Worldview Fracturing

Interestingly, we will come across clients who are experiencing what may be described as cognitive and existential dissonance or worldview tension. This experience can be quite debilitating and painful. This tension comes about when the worldview one embraces does not match up with the way things actually are or if two or more of these ground-floor assumptions are observed to contradict one another.

For example, we may come across a client whose worldview embraces the assumption that men are inferior to women in relation to caring for young children, for example. Yet, when confronted with a male SLP who offers an extraordinary treatment plan and provides excellent care to a child, her worldview is in tension.

Contradictory aspects of one's worldview are observed when one experiences a particular difficulty in life that causes the tension to emerge into the forefront of one's thinking. For others, it is when a contradictory belief is observed and challenged by some member in one's sphere of influence. There is the sudden need for clarity. For others, the tension finds expression when one seeks to evaluate what one believes to determine if the worldview one embraces is the best worldview possible.

If the tension is great enough, the worldview can actually fracture. When a worldview fracturing occurs, several things can happen. A worldview fracturing can be liberating, leading one to embrace a better worldview. For others, it can lead one to a lesser worldview, taking them places they never thought they would go. Therefore, the state of one's worldview may be in flux, stable and flourishing, or static. Therefore, our treatment plans may need adjustment given where they are, where they are going, and even who they are becoming. For example, we may have to approach a client with certain religious beliefs (e.g., a Shiite Muslim) differently than a client who is Christian given the dynamics of male/female relationships.

Questions You Can Ask

When meeting with a client or client's family, there are indirect questions we can ask that will benefit us in understanding their worldview in order to not only be culturally sensitive to their foundational set of beliefs but also to the state of their worldview. Following guidelines related to a comprehensive evaluation assessment, collecting background information, and determining client/family perspective are all part of best practices. The interviewing process is critical for all clients but particularly for CLD populations (for more information related to interviewing CLD clients/families, including ethnographic interviews, see Bauman, Baron, & Prezas, 2016). Allowing clients and families to discuss their backgrounds and beliefs openly with guided questions not only demonstrates your commitment to understanding their perspective but also yields valuable information that may not have been discussed otherwise.

Questions should be open-ended and allow for clients and families to openly share. If an interpreter is needed in order to communicate with the family, prior discussion of goals and training of the interpreter is ideal (for more information on working with interpreters, see Prezas, 2015). Questions to inquire about worldview can be anything from "What are we? Where did we come from? What's gone wrong with society? What can be done to fix the problems of our society? What makes you

most happy? Has _____ given you happiness?" Answers to those questions can be categorized in the eight-fold above-stated categories. We usually can highlight a contemporary event in the news to ask those types of questions. The conversation can be most fascinating. If asked why the questions are raised, the answer is simply to better understand the client in an effort to offer the best care possible. But the best approach is an indirect way whereby they want to share. Ideally, the questions should occur organically. The art of conversation needs to be mastered!

Conclusion

In order to best reach our clients where they are, take them where they need to be, and understand who we are, we will be qualitatively enriched by taking the time to assess their worldviews. You may be saying to yourself, "Yes, but I don't have the time." In special cases, particularly when worldviews may potentially clash, you may need to make the time. Why? Because it's part of our professions. It's what we do. We need to make a good-faith effort and attempt to provide the best possible services for our clients "unless it is clearly not feasible to so provide or administer" (IDEA, 2006; Prezas & Rojas, 2011). While not necessary for doing what we do as SLPs, understanding each other's worldviews not only engenders mutual empathy and respect but also can be used to see from the eyes of others, to design a treatment plan given those assumptions, and even to create bridges of credibility, especially when there are situations of distrust or uncertainties given certain unfamiliarities, fears, or concerns. In essence, knowing who they are and who we are will help us help them in the most strategic ways. Given the emergence of new technologies, the growing diversity within our communities, and the ever-widening spectrum of the types of clients we serve, understanding worldviews becomes a valuable means to best care for those who come into our spheres of influence.

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