

CLD Corner: Q&A for the CLD Experts

The CLD Corner is a regular column written by members of the TSHA Task Force on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity.

The CLD Corner was created in an effort to respond to questions on cultural and linguistic diversity. Questions are answered by members of the TSHA task force on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity. Members for the 2006-2007 year include **Lynette Austin, Gina Glover, Becky Gonzalez, Dolores Castor, Marie Belgodere, Gail Goodrich-Totten, Cynthia Garcia, Katsura Aoyama, Roxanna Ruiz-Felter and Michele Albornóz**. Submit your questions to slaustin@cebridge.net. Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

The CLD Task Force is now offering half and full day trainings for school districts, Education Service Centers, university programs, and other agencies on Assessment and Intervention with CLD Populations. For additional information, contact **Lynette Austin** at slaustin@cebridge.net.

QUESTION: In our district, the Woodcock-Munoz is used for many purposes. How are you using it or recommending it to be used?

ANSWER: There are two stages to language acquisition that all second language learners follow: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1981, 1984). Cummins describes a student's language proficiency by considering the context in which communication takes place. BICS refers to a student's ability to communicate about familiar routines and experiences. CALP refers to a student's ability to communicate complex/abstract concepts in a formal academic setting. Because proficiency is considered to be a dynamic continuum, it can shift from context to context, meaning that you have more knowledge/experience about one topic in one language and yet more experience about another topic in another language. Most proficiency assessment instruments assess BICS and not CALP, which may overestimate a child's proficiency. Bilingual students may be identified as "fluent" speakers of English when they truly only have social (BICS) skills.

The Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey-Revised (WMLS-R) is a proficiency test available in English and Spanish that assesses CALP skills. The WMLS-R provides a broad sampling of academic language proficiency in oral language, language comprehension, reading and writing. The WMLS-R yields various types of derived scores such as the Number Correct, the W scale (Growth Scale), Age-Equivalents, Relative Proficiency Index, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) Levels, Comparative Index, Percentile Ranks, and Standard Scores. Most districts use this instrument in their bilingual education (BE)/English as a second language (ESL) programs to:

- 1) determine eligibility for bilingual education or ESL services and assist with academic placement
- 2) determine English and/or Spanish language proficiency
- 3) determine oral language dominance of bilingual (English/

- Spanish) students
- 4) monitor language growth
- 5) assess readiness of English language learners for English-only instruction

Information as to whether or not a child is proficient in reading and writing is useful to the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) to help determine academic placement. If all subtests are given, the WMLS-R will yield the following language clusters:

- Oral Language-Total
- Reading-Writing
- Broad English Ability-Total
- Applied Language Proficiency
- Listening
- Oral Expression
- Language Comprehension

This instrument is most beneficial when it is given in both languages at the beginning of a child's academic career and consistently given in both languages thereafter to monitor academic language growth. This is because it is difficult to determine if a child's "limited" proficiency was at that level three years ago or if it is a result of language attrition. Therefore, monitoring a child's proficiency year after year provides some of the best diagnostic information for assessment personnel; They can assess whether academic placement impacted language growth at a particular time and/or if they are progressing with their language growth as expected given their specific environmental factors.

Special education assessment personnel may use the WMLS-R scores to help determine which language(s) should be assessed for a learning disability evaluation and/or which cognitive instrument to administer to a student. Speech-language pathologists may also use this instrument as part of their proficiency assessment for their formal language assessment. It is recommended that the speech-language pathologist administer the four subtests listed below because they will yield Oral Language, Listening, Oral Expression, and Oral Language-Total cluster scores.

- subtest 1 Picture Vocabulary
- subtest 2 Analogies
- subtest 5 Understanding Directions
- subtest 6 Story Recall

A note of caution: Speech-language pathologists should not use results of this test as a means to determine whether or not bilingual speech-language assessment is warranted. Low CALP scores (Levels 1 or 2) generally do not mean that we do not assess further in that language. Best practices indicate that we still need to assess functional language in that language, even if only through informal assessment. Sometimes children whose native language is Spanish may score Limited Spanish (CALP 3) on this measure and yet when fully assessed, can perform within normal limits on both informal and formal language tasks in Spanish. This is particularly likely to occur when the child is not being instructed in Spanish. As with all measures, careful interpretation of the results is warranted.