

# CLD Corner: English Language Learners and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students Success in Higher Education

By: CLD Task Force Members

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Corner was created in an effort to provide information and 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 2010-2011 year include **Ellen Stubbe Kester**, PhD, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Margarita Limon-Ordonez**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Lynette Austin**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **M. Ruth Fernandez**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Barbara Fernandes**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Rachel Aghara**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Lisa Carver**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Tracey Gray**, MA, CCC-SLP; and **Sarah Panjwani**, BA. Submit your questions to [ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com](mailto:ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com). Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and the *Communicologist*.

The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (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 information, contact Ellen Kester at [ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com](mailto:ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com).

You may know someone who wants to be a speech-language pathologist or audiologist, but does not know if they can be successful in the profession. He or she may be the graduate student who demonstrates academic strength, but has accented English speech and struggles with judging and presenting Standard English models or perhaps the student is judged to have difficulty taking objective tests, or making class presentations but whom typically uses Standard English speech production and has strong clinical skills. It could be the student who comes to the United States as a young adult and struggles with the discourse styles used in class and during some interpersonal exchanges. He or she may be one of the Hispanic students from the United States, Mexico, Columbia, Guatemala, and Honduras who present different levels of acculturation and different levels of Standard English or Standard Spanish proficiency and may struggle with cultural expectations in the classroom, clinical exchanges or judging and using certain standard forms of either language. For these students, certain cultural and linguistic features detract from the talents they bring to the profession. Table 1 lists some features that can interfere with communication and the demonstration of clinical competence.

Table 1: Cultural & Linguistic Features

Discourse at the cultural level
Dialects and accents
Suprasegmental features
Code Switching
Writing skills
Oral language skills

What do these students often say? "I want to be a speech-language pathologist." "I want to hear Standard English forms, to use them in my speech, and to write in Standard English forms." "I want to fit in without losing my own cultural identity."

## UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE

Faculty in higher education report that students must learn the specialized practices of academic reading, writing, and speaking that characterize college level communication. Faculty report the desire to learn about and incorporate students' backgrounds, build on student competencies, understand student needs and aspirations, and draw on differences among them to come to an effective outcome in academic and professional performance.

A review of the literature in higher education and student success yielded methods for promoting success. As educators reflect on the success of CLD students within this discipline, one primary focus is on creating opportunities to systematically access standard language forms and their regional variations. This provides a foundation for CLD student learning and practices for all who work with CLD populations.

## DOZENS OF WAYS

In general, approaches to support students can include communicating assignment requirements and behavioral expectations clearly, using cooperative learning within and across cultural groups, teaching lessons that focus on contrastive awareness between target languages and cultures as well as interpersonal and disciplinary discourse conventions. All of these are done in the context of highly interactive and vibrant learning communities. The following is a list of additional examples.

- Provide face-to-face and online interactions that promote
  - A sense of community
  - The creation of a positive interdependence
  - Equal participation among class members
  - Simultaneous interactions among class members
- Class structure that includes
  - Routinely providing time for the sharing of ideas and opinions
  - Additional practice time for listening, speaking, reading and writing across the curriculum

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- The use of cooperative learning activities (Mason, 2006) and projects that promote the development of
  - Extemporaneous thinking and presenting of ideas
  - Activities in which the organization of ideas is the focus
  - A professional and personal voice
  - The identification and aspects of different perspectives on a topic
  - Adequate voice volume
  - Near native intonation patterns for target languages
  - Routine class presentation of project or paper proposal presentation and peer and instructor critiques
- The offering of activities or assignment that focus on listening to and speaking Standard English, accented forms, dialects and regional variations
- Creation of times and places for sharing personal stories
- The provision for computer assisted learning for reading and writing Standard English
- Training in specialized practices in college level reading, writing and speaking skills
- Arrangement of focused content and writing across the curriculum and within learning communities (Curry, 2004)
- Provision of effectively communicated requirements and expectations
- Contrastive discussions of language, culture, and discourse conventions in higher education
- Additional time during high stakes testing
- Translated versions of examinations in student primary language (Friedenberg, 2002)

The challenge comes in as educators strive to put these ideas into practice. These ideas can be put into practice by providing recordings of course content and technical vocabulary for student to take additional time to listen to in groups or independently. Instructors can also provide materials that contrast languages in the areas of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse and suprasegmental properties. The following is a summary of a set of studies that evaluated strategies implemented for CLD students.

### Sample Practices

Curry (2004) reviews the practices that English language learners (ELLs) must learn in terms of academic reading, writing, and speaking in order to cope with college-level communication. The study describes the diversity of the learners' cultural backgrounds and aspirations and how the structure of community colleges may affect the success the student has in learning and using English. Strategies discussed to support ELLs include providing explicit classroom communication, cooperative learning activities, teaching contrastive awareness, linking the ESOL program to disciplinary content, and creating

learning communities. Curry (2004) strongly supports the idea that establishing learning communities within a department will establish higher achievement in the use of language.

Mason (2006) focuses on the use of cooperative learning in a first-year composition class, as a way of enhancing both written and oral communication among ELLs. The author defines the term, cooperative learning, and then discusses techniques she uses in her composition course to help establish English language skills in second language users. The author discusses in-class cooperative activities that place students in pairs or teams of four to five, where they share ideas and information as a prelude to an assigned writing task. These small discussion groups provide authentic contexts for meaningful spoken communication and thus help in the development of oral language skills.

### Professions Call to Educators

The ideas listed above and reiterated in the sample studies provide models from which educators can draw to bring in and expand the talents of CLD and ELL students. The demand for professionals to do research and provide services is great. The students are present. Colleges and universities are poised to continue serving CLD and ELL students in higher education. The examples documented are clear and inspiring. Financial constraints and issues of privilege notwithstanding we are called to expand methods in higher education that promote success. Let us meet the challenge and increase the number of ELL and CLD students who become professionals in the field of Communication Disorders and Sciences.

For a complete reference list and recommended readings, go on line to the TSHA CLD Corner or contact **M. Ruth Fernandez** at [mrfernandez@ollusa.edu](mailto:mrfernandez@ollusa.edu).

### ABBREVIATED REFERENCE LIST

- Curry, M.J. (2004). UCLA community college review: Academic literacy for English language learners. *Community College Review*, 32(2), 51-68.
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- Mason, K. (2006). Cooperative learning and second language acquisition in first-year composition: Opportunities for authentic communication among English language learners. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 34(1), 52-58.