

Working With a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Individual With Specific Learning Disability

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the constantly rising multilingualism in the United States, cultural and linguistic diversity is gradually becoming more and more present at schools throughout the country. Therefore, there is a critical need for resources to support speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) clients. This case study examines a CLD client with a diagnosis of specific learning disability (SLD). SLD is a disorder characterized by one or more significant impairments in reading, spelling, writing, or arithmetical skills, which are not the direct result of other disorders or inadequate schooling. This chapter discusses approaches to appropriately assess the client's language skills and provides intervention suggestions to account for the CLD nature of the client and her SLD.

INTRODUCTION

The number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students has been growing significantly in recent years (Counts, Katsiyannis, & Whitford, 2018). With this quick growth comes an equally critical need for accurate evaluation, effective treatment in speech-language pathology as well as other related services for CLD students in the school system. There is a significant need for resources to support speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to work with CLD clients. Research indicates that specific learning disability (SLD) accounts for 50% of all identified disabilities among CLD populations (Langdon, 2008). SLD is a disorder characterized by one or more significant impairments in reading, spelling, writing, or mathematical skills, which are not the direct result of other disorders or inadequate schooling. This chapter focuses on Nancy, a CLD student with the diagnosis of SLD. The study discusses approaches and strategies to provide appropriate language services for Nancy.

CLD Issues in Communication Disorders

Currently 7,099 languages are spoken in the world (Simons & Fennig, 2017). The use of a language other than English at home is at an all-time high (Simons & Fennig, 2017), and is estimated to continue to increase, particularly in languages such as Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, and Russian (Rumbaut & Massey, 2013). According to the 2010 American Community Survey (as cited in Rumbaut & Massey, 2013), 20.3% of the U.S. residents reported that they spoke a non-English language at home. It was noted that the percentage of the population who spoke only English by decade between 1980 and 2010 decreased from 89.1% to 79.7% (Rumbaut & Massey, 2013). In 2016, 22% of the children in U.S. spoke a language other than English at home (Kids Count Data Center [KCDC], 2018), and this number increased to 23% in 2017 (KCDC, 2019). According to Migration Policy Institute (2016), CLD students have increased more than 50% over the past decade, and this trend is expected to continue into the next decade. With the rapid multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual growth at schools, classroom teachers and SLPs have a critical role to play in identifying and meeting the needs of all students, including CLD students' language development and abilities. With this extreme growth in multilingualism comes an equally extreme need for accurate evaluation and effective treatment for CLD children in the school system. SLPs have to adjust to a variety of populations with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds instead of relying on "one-size-fits-all paradigm" (Centeno, 2015; Langdon, 2008, 2015; Levey et al., 2013; Ooi & Wong, 2012).

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Learning disabilities (LD) refers to a heterogeneous group of neurological disorders which cause significant difficulties with listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills (Ali et al., 2017). That is, LD influences an individual's ability to efficiently process, maintain, or convey information while communicating with the other people (Sharfi & Rosenblum, 2014). Two subgroups of LD are commonly identified, non-specific and specific. Non-specific LD are caused by problems with visual and/or auditory processing, and/or the processing speed. Specific LD (SLD) is a category that includes conditions such as imperfect abilities to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (Backhouse & Morris, 2005; Banai & Ahissar, 2006; Casalis, Cole, & Sopo, 2004; Geary & Hoard, 2001; Schultz, Simpson, & Lynch, 2012). Although different researchers may have different classifications of SLD, and some researchers claim that SLD can be different across various individuals (Clark & Uhry, 1995; Myers & Hammill, 1976), the most commonly used classification of SLD is: (1) Dyslexia - difficulties in reading, spelling and writing (including changing the order of letters and pronunciation); (2) Dyscalculia - problems calculating numbers or understanding mathematical concepts; and (3) Dysgraphia - problems with hand writing such as illegible writing. That is, the general characteristics and signs of SLD include language and math. According to studies conducted in different parts of world, the prevalence of specific reading disorder is 4% of the school-age population and the prevalence of specific spelling disorder is almost the same, while the prevalence of specific disorder of mathematical skills is 6% of the school-age population (Fletcher & Miciak, 2017). Although the number of students classified with SLD grew steadily from 1975 until 2000 at which time they began to decline since 2000 (Cortiella, 2011), SLD continues to be the largest of the eligibility classifications under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Zirkel, 2018).

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