



CLD Language and Literacy Development

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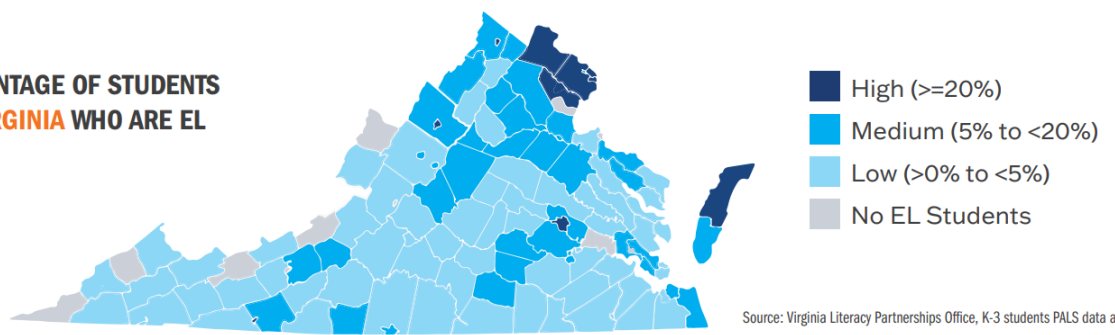
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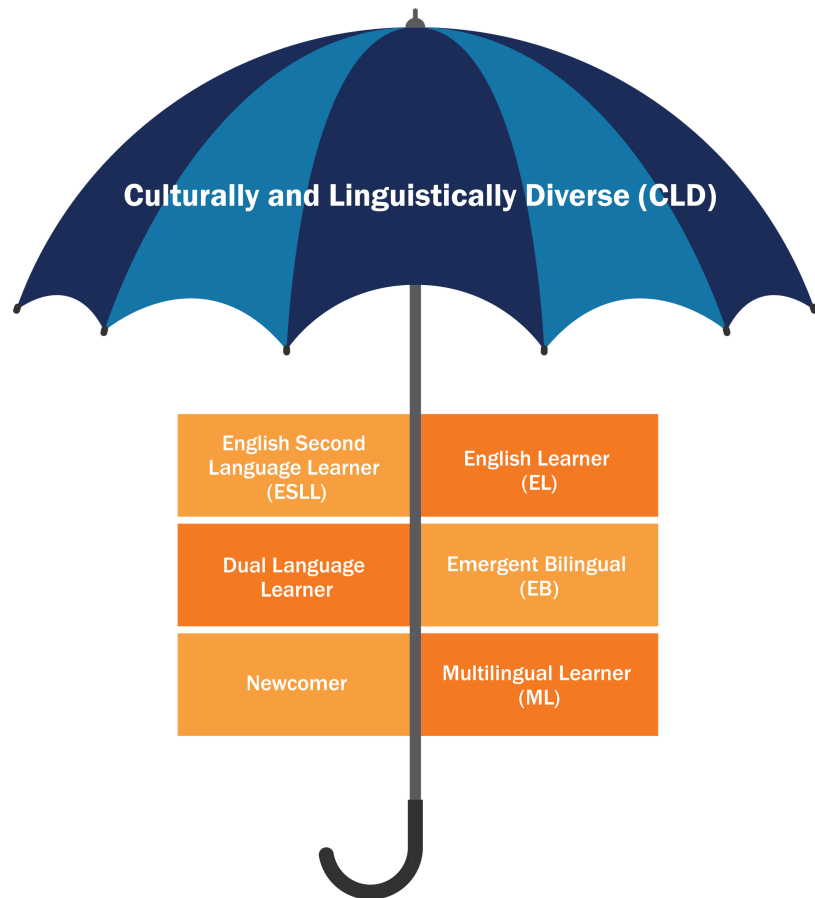
In the Commonwealth of Virginia, there are over 240 languages represented in K-12 schools and the Commonwealth serves over 117,000 English Learners (Virginia Department of Education, 2023). Due to the increased number of linguistically and culturally diverse students enrolled in our schools, it is essential to be aware of evidence-based literacy instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students, which, also happen to be the overall best practices for teaching language and literacy.

What is a CLD student?

Children throughout the United States experience speaking and listening to multiple languages at home and in school. There are various terms used to describe students with exposure to multiple languages, such as bilingual, emergent bilingual, multilingual, English Learner (EL), English Second Language Learner (ESLL), and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). There is a discussion in bilingual education about which terminology is best to use, as certain terms exclude students based on language ability.



The term CLD includes children of all language abilities who are being raised in minority language homes with some exposure to their native language (Baker, Basaraba, & Polanco, 2016). Because of its inclusivity and wider meaning, we will be primarily using the term culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) in this paper. At times when we cite research that focuses on English Learners, we use the term EL. An EL is a student who participates in language assistance programs. Data on culturally and linguistically diverse students can be confusing at times because as students who are classified as a current EL gain a higher level in English language proficiency, they may become reclassified as Fluent English Proficient; additionally there are students who speak languages other than (or in addition to) English at home but who arrive at school with English proficiency and are not classified as English Learners (Saunders & Marcelletti 2013; Kieffer & Thompson 2018; Goodrich et al 2021).



What does language development and literacy look like for CLD students?

The good news is that as more and more research has emerged about how to best teach reading, writing, and language skills (literacy and language) to culturally and linguistically diverse populations, we have learned that it is similar to what we know to be best practices for monolingual students (Vargas et al., 2021). In this section, we will go over what language and literacy acquisition and development look like for CLD students and what is both similar and different for these students versus monolingual students.

Language Acquisition and Proficiency

Language development is a multifaceted process that involves social, cognitive, and linguistic elements. For a CLD student, vocabulary knowledge and proficiency are influenced by the level of exposure to each of their languages. Their vocabulary knowledge and proficiency are different from those of monolingual students and develop in a distinct way from those of monolingual speakers (Oller & Eilers, 2002) and distribution of knowledge (Grosjean, 1998). CLD students vary in both the amount of exposure and the context they have with their languages (Paradis & Gruter, 2014). They may hear one language more than the other; they may be able to read in one language but not the other; or they may experience different conversational partners with varying degrees of proficiencies and different topics of conversation in their two languages. These differences in experience produce multiple patterns of bilingual proficiency in young children (Bialystok & Peets, 2010). The more input, such as being read to, spoken to, or engaged in conversation, a child receives in a language, the better the child performs on vocabulary, reading, and writing tests in that language (De Houwer, 2007; Duursma et al., 2007).





Additionally, when a child is learning one language, the demands associated with learning vocabulary and language conventions are focused on that single language. In contrast, a CLD student who is learning more than one language at a time has access to all the conventions of multiple languages. This allows them to adapt their language and pull one structure from one language and vocabulary from another. Code-switching and language mixing such as “Spanglish” may be perceived negatively, but, in fact, they are not! Instead, they are ways for a child to make sense of multiple languages and their structures at once and in different situations. (García, 2009a).

In development, bilingual children acquire the same types of words and structures as do their monolingual peers – even if the specific words they know vary. For example, similar to monolingual toddlers, culturally and linguistically diverse toddlers demonstrate rapid growth in vocabulary knowledge. CLD children, like their monolingual counterparts, make inferences to understand the meaning of words (Frank & Poulin-Dubois, 2002; Merriman & Kutlesic, 1993; Poulin-Dubois et al., 1999). However, they may not know the same words in each language since vocabulary acquisition is language and context specific. For example, in English, a CLD child may associate the following words in English with a birthday party: hot dog, chips, and ice cream; while in Spanish they may associate: frijoles [beans], carne asada [barbeque], and pastel [cake]. From infancy through adulthood, CLD children demonstrate shared and unique vocabulary (Deuchar & Quay, 2000).





Gaps in vocabulary can be problematic for school-age children who must use specific words in academic tasks (Carlo et al. 2004). The lack of academic vocabulary hinders students from accessing content in their learning environment. It is important to take into consideration that CLD students may use their knowledge of vocabulary in one language to facilitate word learning in the other language (Gawlitzek-Maiwald & Tracy 1996; Ordóñez et al. 2002). For example, a student might understand the concept of multiplication in their home language, but not know the word multiplication in English. Through explicit instruction and with the right supports and instructional practices in place, a teacher can help students make the connection between languages without having to relearn the concept.



Like monolingual students, ELs must develop skills that contribute to word reading (e.g., phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, phonics knowledge, decoding) and skills that contribute to linguistic comprehension (e.g., vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of syntax; Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). Proficiency in both word reading (i.e., code-based skills) and linguistic comprehension (i.e., language-based skills) is necessary for successful reading comprehension. If ELs have these skills in their dominant language, with explicit instruction, they will transfer over as they learn their new language and develop their reading comprehension skills in their non-dominant language (Goldenberg, 2020). Just like their monolingual peers, ELs require explicit instruction in five core reading elements—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension— (US Department of Education Practice Guide, 2014).

Language-based skills, such as vocabulary and listening comprehension, are important indicators of reading comprehension for all students entering primary grades. On average, language-based skills make a larger contribution to reading comprehension for all students as they progress beyond the primary grades and text complexity increases. This is particularly true for ELs. Therefore, there is a need to support ELs in developing their linguistic comprehension skills and instruction should begin early in schooling (Vargas et al. 2021).

Monolingual children draw on their oral language knowledge as they learn to read; however, ELs do not have this advantage because they are not habitually using and hearing English at home. As English Learners gain a better handle on their oral language, their ability to comprehend their reading increases; this means that literacy instruction must take language development into account (Goldenberg 2020; Vargas et al. 2021). It is important for teachers to explicitly structure and plan English oral language instruction for ELs that directly aligns with reading instruction (Goldenberg, 2020)—giving students unstructured time in class to talk in English is not enough. Oral language development for ELs can boost their literacy skills by giving them the tools to connect the sounds with letters and words; this instruction needs to increase in complexity as both language and literacy develop (Goldenberg, 2020).



Explicit Instruction for Learning Across Languages

One method of building vocabulary is to capitalize on a student's first language knowledge. Researchers observed that cognates and translation equivalents (defined and explained in the sections below) provide evidence that learning a second language does not impede the development of the first language and may aid in its development (Anaya, 2021). Second-language acquisition research has identified transfer as an important process involved in the acquisition of a second language. Transfer is defined as the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired (Odlin, 1989). Utilizing longitudinal data from school-aged children, research has found that knowing a word in Spanish significantly increased the odds of the child producing the word in English (Anaya, 2021).



Cognates

Cognates are words that overlap in form (orthographic and/or phonologic) and meaning (semantic) across languages. For example, the cognate of *active* in Spanish is *activo*. Experiments conducted to measure the production and recognition of words have demonstrated that cognates are more easily recognized than non-cognates (Costa et. al, 2005) reported that students have greater ease in recognizing cognates when naming them in their non-dominate language than in their dominate language. This finding suggests that cognates are an optimal starting point when teaching CLD students new words in their less proficient language.

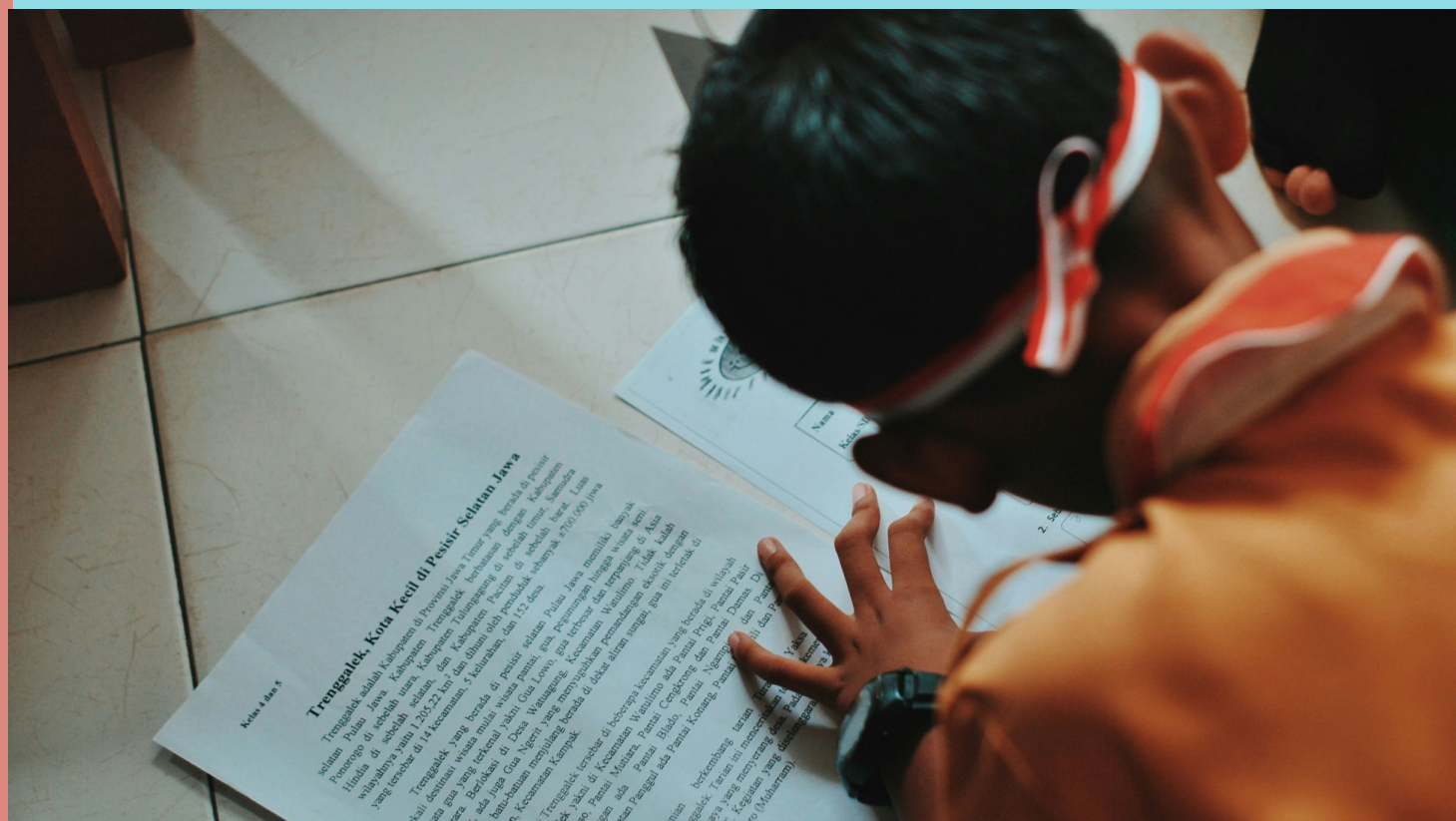
Translation Equivalents

Translation equivalents (TE) are words in different languages that mean and refer to the same concept. For example, a translation equivalent of *dog* would be *perro* in Spanish. Bilingual and multilingual speakers will almost always have two or more words to name the same object and, more generally, to express the same concept in speech. Several investigators have demonstrated that it is easier for bilingual students to identify a vocabulary word in their non-dominant language when looking at an image if they are first given the image-associated word in their dominant language. (Basnight-Brown & Altarriba, 2007). This finding lends support to the strategy of “bridging” or “pre-teaching” new words in the home language. The Bridge is the “instructional moment when teachers help students connect the content-area knowledge and skills they have learned in one language to the other language” (Beeman & Urow, 2013. p.4)



Multi-Language Learning

Explicit instruction of words, such as providing definitions and synonyms, have been shown to facilitate vocabulary learning in children, in some cases this approach doubled the number of words students learned (Elley, 1989). Poullisse (1997) suggested that children learn, produce, and understand vocabulary in their second language (L2) through experience in the same way they do for their first language (L1). Over time, CLD vocabulary knowledge in both languages grows with multiple exposures and contexts as they associate additional semantic features, meaning of words, with words and begin to recognize how words in one language relate to the corresponding words in the other language. The Cummins model of bilingualism (1981) proposes learning and teaching new words through a supportive and interdependent relationship between first and second languages. In this model, English Learners can use their conceptual learning of their first language as the base of acquiring their second language (Cummins, 1981). It stands to reason that by providing vocabulary instruction in L1, young children would be expected to be able to better use or process lexical input in L2.



ASSESSMENT



Accurate and dependable assessments are an integral part of identifying whether students need intervention services, and, if so, which services they need to be successful in school. Given the divided knowledge between their two languages, it is essential that CLDs' language and literacy skills be assessed in both of their languages to gain a holistic understanding of their full abilities. However, one of the challenges is that there is a lack of bilingual assessment tools available and/or a lack of evaluators proficient in more than one language. Assessing a culturally and linguistically diverse student with a test that has not been created for their language profile can result in a skewed and inaccurate measure of their language and literacy skills. It is also well established that the use of translated tests does not produce a valid measure of ability (Pert & Letts, 2003). Sometimes the sample population that is used to norm or "test" the assessment during its creation is not representative or inclusive of a culturally and linguistically diverse population. This may mean that grammatical structures and cultural references do not directly translate when a test is directly translated from one language to another (Pert & Letts, 2003).





CLD students have unique challenges and strengths. Each student's experience and exposure to language is different and therefore, may need different strategies and supports to develop their oral language skills and reading comprehension skills. What stands true for all CLD students, however, is that just like English monolingual students, they must develop word reading and linguistic comprehension, and they can do this while learning the language. By leveraging the student's cultural and linguistic diversity, teachers can foster academic success and help bridge the gap between student's home language and their new language at school, enriching their literacy instruction.

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