



## Supporting culturally and linguistically diverse children with speech, language and communication needs: Overarching principles, individual approaches



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### ABSTRACT

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are working with an increasing number of families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as the world's population continues to become more internationally mobile. The heterogeneity of these diverse populations makes it impossible to identify and document a one size fits all strategy for working with culturally and linguistically diverse families. This paper explores approaches to practice by SLPs identified as specialising in multilingual and multicultural practice in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts from around the world. Data were obtained from ethnographic observation of 14 sites in 5 countries on 4 continents. The sites included hospital settings, university clinics, school-based settings, private practices and Indigenous community-based services. There were 652 individual artefacts collected from the sites which included interview transcripts, photographs, videos, narrative reflections, informal and formal field notes. The data were analysed using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987). From the analysis six overarching Principles of Culturally Competent Practice (PCCP) were identified. These were: (1) identification of culturally appropriate and mutually motivating therapy goals, (2) knowledge of languages and culture, (3) use of culturally appropriate resources, (4) consideration of the cultural, social and political context, (5) consultation with families and communities, and (6) collaboration between professionals. These overarching principles align with the six position statements developed by the International Expert Panel on Multilingual Children's Speech (2012) which aim to enhance the cultural competence of speech pathologists and their practice. The international examples provided in the current study demonstrate the individualised ways that these overarching principles are enacted in a range of different organisational, social, cultural and political contexts. Tensions experienced in enacting the principles are also discussed. This paper emphasises the potential for individual SLPs to enhance their practice by adopting these overarching principles to support the individual children and families in diverse contexts around the world.

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## 1. Introduction

In the field of speech-language pathology the need to engage in culturally competent practice with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is identified in a number of key professional documents (e.g., American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, ASHA, 2004a; Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, 1997; International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics, 2011; International Expert Panel on Multilingual Children's Speech, 2012; Speech Pathology Australia, 2009). Culturally competent practice “acknowledges and incorporates—at all levels—the importance of culture, assessment of cross-cultural relations, vigilance towards the dynamics that result from cultural differences, expansion of cultural knowledge, and adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs” (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, & Ananeh-Firempong, 2003, p. 294).

In this paper the term “culturally and linguistically diverse” is used to refer to children and families who are not of the dominant language and cultural background of the broader social context in which they reside, as well as children and families with multiple linguistic and cultural influences. The many challenges that speech-language pathologists (SLPs) face in the provision of services to culturally and linguistically diverse populations have been documented extensively. These include lack of: culturally appropriate tools for assessment; developmental norms for linguistically diverse populations; service provision in children's primary languages; professional support and training for working with families from different cultural backgrounds, and sufficient time to undertake additional elements of practice recommended for working with diverse families (Caesar & Kohler, 2007; Guiberson & Atkins, 2012; Jordaan, 2008; Kritikos, 2003; McLeod & Baker, 2014; Pascoe & Norman, 2011; Peña & Iglesias, 1992; Stow & Dodd, 2003; Williams & McLeod, 2012). However, limited data have been published regarding practical approaches for overcoming these challenges.

Often in the field of speech-language pathology professionals are directed towards a gold standard method of enacting practice for certain groups of patients or disorders (Dollaghan, 2004). The trouble with identifying and implementing one gold standard approach to practice with culturally and linguistically diverse populations is that it tends to lead to homogenising practices based on the dominant culture and fails to acknowledge the complexity, variation and strengths that exist among the individuals and families that SLPs serve (Verdon, McLeod, & Wong, 2015). Therefore, rather than advocating for a standard one size fits all model of best practice, this paper proposes a set of six key overarching Principles of Culturally Competent Practice (PCCP) that provide guidance to SLPs in their practice with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A principles-based approach is used to guide practice in a number of fields including speech-language pathology, education, and nursing (e.g., Hatfield, 1995; Royal College of Nursing, 2014; Speech Pathology Australia, 2014). The current paper identifies principles for embracing and supporting culturally and linguistically diverse families that can be applied to all, given that every family has their own unique cultural influences. This paper draws upon international examples to illustrate individual approaches to applying these overarching PCCP as undertaken by SLPs in multilingual and multicultural practice in diverse contexts around the globe.

### 1.1. Children's speech and language development

The development of functional speech, language and communication skills is an essential component of childhood and lays the foundation for lifelong autonomy and participation in society (McCormack, McLeod, McAllister, & Harrison, 2009; Stothard, Snowling, Bishop, Chipchase, & Kaplan, 1998). Therefore, it is important that children receive rich exposure and support to develop competency in the language(s) they speak.

#### 1.1.1. Language, culture and identity

With increased mobility of people between countries over the last few decades, cultural and linguistic diversity has become a common feature of many societies around the world (Hugo, 2004; Ottaviano & Peri, 2006). The United Nations' Global Commission on International Migration found that in 2005 there were almost 200 million international migrants around the world, as compared with 82 million in 1970 (Global Commission on International Migration, 2005). Many children considered to be culturally and linguistically diverse come from migrant families. This includes both new migrants as well as families and communities who may have migrated to a country a number of generations ago. Migration may result from forced relocation, due to war or natural disaster, or the voluntary relocation of families seeking better social or economic opportunities in a new country. In the process of migrating to a new country, families are faced with complex issues such as loss of identity, loss of status and loss of connection to family and community (Wong Fillmore, 1991). One key way that migrant families maintain a connection to their home country and identity is through the preservation of language and culture. Similarly, the preservation and continuation of identity among Indigenous people whose lands have been colonised is supported by the maintenance of culture and language (Williams, 2013). Therefore, supporting children's cultural and linguistic diversity during the development of their speech, language and communication is integral to developing their sense of self and cultural identity (Park & Sarkar, 2007; Puig, 2010).

Parents and professionals alike often find it difficult to create balance between what is perceived as necessary acculturation to the dominant context (including understanding of the dominant culture and mastery of the dominant language) and the preservation of families' own language and culture. It has long been recognised that when two or more cultures interact on a regular basis, attributes from each culture will be adopted and in turn the original cultures themselves

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