

# Cultural Mediation: Building Bridges



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# Outcomes

- To understand and value culture
- To understand the definition and role of a cultural mediator (interpreter/translator)
- To appreciate the role a cultural mediator plays in the referral, evaluation and identification of learners who are CLD with suspected disabilities

# What is Culture?

“Culture is the set of practices and beliefs that is shared with members of a particular group that distinguishes one group from others.”

Lindsey, R., Robins, K., & Terrell, R., 2009

# Cultural Portrait

Each of us belongs to a number of cultural groups. These groups reflect our ethnicity, occupational and vocational cultures, and social groups that shape or reflect our values. Membership in a group is determined by how you identify with the group members, as well as how those group members perceive you.

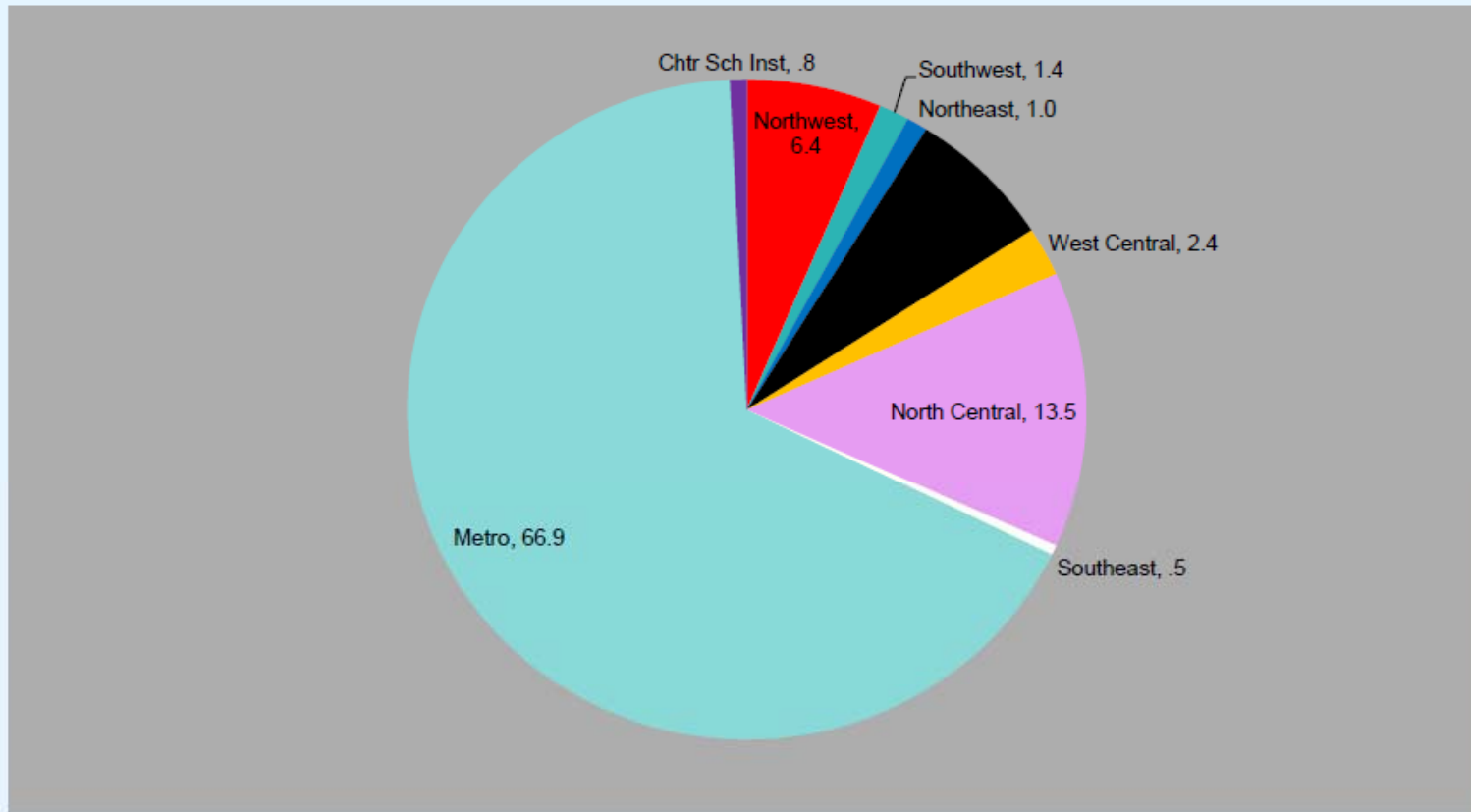
Lindsey, R., Robins, K., & Terrell, R., 2009

# Top 20 Language Spoken in Colorado

In 2009-2010, there were 165 different languages represented by Colorado EL's Office of Language, Culture, and Equity  
Data source October Count

Language	Number	Language	Number
1. Spanish	116,357	11. Somali	541
2. Vietnamese	3068	12. Nepali	491
3. Russian	1557	13. German	479
4. Arabic	1369	14. Tagalog	461
5. Korean	1,333	15. Khmer	346
6. Chinese, Mandarin	1,270	16. Navajo	318
7. Hmong	921	17. Japanese	308
8. Amharic	655	18. Polish	290
9. French	594	19. Lao	277
10. Chinese, Cantonese	564	20. Karen	257

## EL Geographic Distribution by Region 2009-2010



10/18/2010

Office of Language, Culture and  
Equity

Data Source: Student October

# ELL Growth Rate in Colorado

- Colorado total **K-12** enrollment growth rate over the last twelve years = **15.6%**
- Colorado **ELL** total enrollment growth rate over the last ten years = **260%**

Office of Language, Culture, and Equity, 2010



# Legal Background

“assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a child under this part-are provided and administered in the child’s native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible” §300.304 (1)(ii)



# A Trained Interpreter Is:

- Someone who has been briefed on what their role is.
- Someone who is familiar with the purpose of the assessment.
- Someone who is able to bridge the differences between the school culture and the student's and family's culture.

# Cultural Mediator

An individual that helps translate between the culture of a school environment and a child's family in order to enhance understanding, share information, and create a relationship that supports families.



# Guiding Principals

- **Value** culture and language differences as potential strengths.
- **Respect** all parents and **actively** seek their participation.
- Continue to **learn** about and support **cultural competence**.
- **Avoid** soliciting family members or students as interpreters/translators.

# Who Can Be A Cultural Mediator?

## A person who:

- Has **proficiency** in English as well as the families/student's home language.
- Has **cultural knowledge** and sensitivity of the targeted culture.
- Has the ability to **bridge** and educate between the school's culture, personnel, and CLD families.
- Is highly **skilled** in interpersonal relationships.

# Who Can Be A Cultural Mediator?

## (Continued)

### A person who:

- Is able to maintain **confidentiality**.
- Possesses the ability to stay **neutral** in the process.
- **Reports** both parties concerns **accurately**.
- Is willing to be **flexible**, continue to **refine** his or her skills, and stay within his or her role.

# Definition of Cultural Competence

- Involves the understanding of two cultures
- Involves the acquisition of social and pragmatic knowledge, meaning “knowing what to say to whom, where and when”
- Involves knowing that generalizations should be avoided as much as possible

Langdon & Cheng, 2002

# Interpreter

## A person who:

Speaks both English and the targeted language proficiently in translating a spoken message from L1 to L2.



# Translator

## A person who:

Exhibits proficient literacy in both English and the target language to render the content and meaning of a written message into its equivalent from L1 to L2.

# Selection of Interpreters/Translators

## Remember:



- Selection should be consistent rather than temporary to ensure quality of services.
- Recruiting family members, minors, or friends should be avoided.
- Recruiting someone without appropriate training should be avoided.
- In selecting candidates, solicit preferred sources (such as):
  - Educational or rehabilitative fields, community centers, or embassies

Langdon, 2008

## 8 Qualities of an Effective Interpreter/Translator

### Effective interpreters/translators possess . . .

1. A high degree of oral and written proficiency in both L1 and L2.
2. The ability to convey meaning from one language to the other.
3. The ability to understand and adjust to the speaker's role and background.
4. The ability to adjust to linguistic variations within different communities: synthesize verbal and nonverbal communication in two languages.

# 8 Qualities of an Effective Interpreter/Translator

(Continued)

## Effective interpreters/translators possess . . .

5. Knowledge about the culture of the people who speak the languages.
6. A familiarity with the specific procedures and vocabulary used in the educational field.
7. An understanding their role.
8. The ability to remain neutral.

Langdon, 2008

# Personal Characteristics

## Interpreters/translators must be:

- Flexible
- Honest
- Prompt and respectful of times and timelines
- Committed to improve their skills continuously
- Able to provide accurate interpretations and maintain neutrality
- Able to keep **all** information confidential

Langdon, 2008

# Locating a Cultural Mediator (Interpreter/Translator)

## Where can you locate a cultural mediator (interpreter/translator)?

- Public organizations such as: schools, hospitals, universities, migrant help, county agencies, professional agencies, etc.
- Community Organizations such as: churches, service organizations, cultural social clubs, etc.

You may want to visit the [Colorado Translator Association](#) website

# Specific Tasks

**What are some examples of cultural mediators' (interpreters/translators) specific tasks in the school environment?**

- Meetings
- Observations
- Instruction
- Testing
- Psychological services
- Health services
- Social services
- Support services



# Ethical Considerations

## Cultural mediators (interpreters/translators) must:

- **Only** accept assignments within their language, culture, and subject matter competence.
- Continue the ongoing process of their professional development.
- Respect appointment times and deadlines.
- Bring unsolved problems to the attention of the person, or team, with whom they are working.



# Ethical Considerations

(Continued)

## Cultural mediators (interpreters/translators) must:

- Uphold **CONFIDENTIALITY** regarding **ALL** student records and information about the student and their families.
- Refrain from making exaggerated claims.
- Abstain from criticizing the work of other cultural mediators (interpreters/translators).

# Ethical Considerations

(Continued)

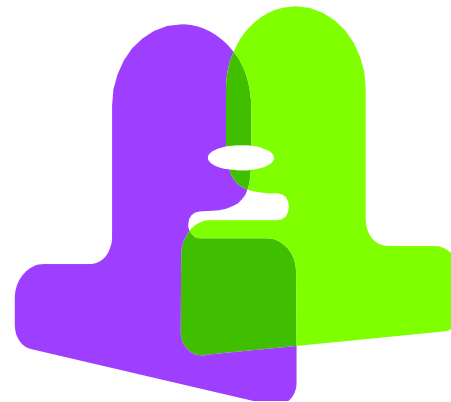
## **Cultural mediators (interpreters/translators) must:**

- Maintain neutrality. All that is said, by all parties, must be transmitted in its entirety.
- Demonstrate impartiality by treating all persons in the same way.
- Be regarded and valued as a critical member of the school site team.

# Three Components of Effective Interpretation

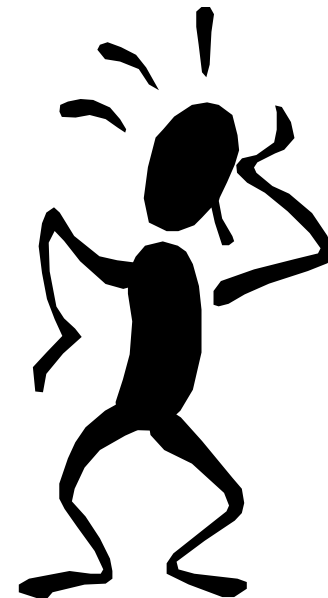
**Consider what you think must be included within each component:**

1. Briefing
2. Interaction
3. Debriefing



# Common Interpreting/Translating Errors

- Omissions
- Additions
- Substitutions
- Transformations



# Ethnographic Conversations

## Goals of Ethnographic Conversations:

To discover through the family's perspective:

- What the child does.
- What the child does not do.
- Who and what support the child to perform his/her best?
- What compromises the child's best performance?

Westby, 2004

# Ethnographic Conversations

## Types of Problematic Questions to Avoid:

- Bombardment and Grilling
- Multiple Questions
- Questions as Statements
- Closed-Ended Questions

Westby, 2004

# Examples: Descriptive Questions

- Tell me about your child... **vs.** What is your child's name and what is his/her problem?
- What are your concerns about your child? **vs.** Are you concerned about your child's learning?
- Share with me what you want to know more about... **vs.** I will tell what you need to know about ...

# Ethnographic Conversations

## Why should you conduct an ethnographic conversation?

- It will help you create a trusting and respectful relationship.
- It will help you gather and share important information relevant to the family.





# Ethnographic Conversations



- Have a conversation not an interview.
- Share the power and let the family do the talking.
- Ask lots of open ended questions with lots of pauses.
- Focus on family strengths and successes.
- Encourage different views without judging them.

# Ethnographic Conversations

- Create an atmosphere of exchange.
- Facilitate parent participation.
- Recognize the specific needs of particular parents.
- Refrain from using professional jargon.
- Provide information.
- Be sensitive to challenges.
- Recognize strengths.



# Documentation

**The following statements represent examples of information that a team should include in their body of evidence:**

- Maria, the cultural mediator, noted that the family has recently arrived in the U.S. because of a change in the father's employment.
- Oliti is the oldest of three children and is the only child who has every been exposed to English in her household.



# Documentation

## Questions to Consider:

- Was the cultural mediator involved in translating/interpreting an evaluation?
- What input did the cultural mediator have in following the evaluation to the question “Is this typical of a . . . .”
- Are there cultural beliefs that may influence the parents’ comfort level with the process?
- Did the cultural mediator provide input that helped the team distinguish between a true educational disability and a cultural/linguistic difference?



“Culture is like the wind. You cannot touch it or see it, but you know it when you feel it, and you see its effect.”

Anonymous

