SWCA 2025 Conference Proposal

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Presenter Information

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Institution Type

Public land-grant research institution

Type of presentation:

10-minute presentation

Presentation Title

Learning to Lead: Empowering Multilingual Learners through Speaking Support

Abstract (50 – 100 words maximum)

Tutors are adept at providing writing-focused feedback, but many feel challenged to explain and suggest improvements to MLs on speaking skills from a linguistic perspective. Recognizing this gap, the speaker researched the Conversational Consultation (CC) project to address these concerns and equip tutors with leadership tools to support MLs in developing speaking skills in areas such as vocabulary, inflection, listening skills, etc. In this presentation, participants will explore effective consulting strategies to enable tutors to support MLs' speaking skills, as well as leadership-focused training approaches within writing centers that empower tutors to create an inclusive learning environment for MLs.

Proposal (250- 500 words)

Multilingual learners (MLs) face unique academic challenges in higher education, particularly when they need to complete projects that connect writing and speaking. While writing centers typically focus on providing writing feedback, MLs also seek help from peer tutors for speaking projects and the conversational skills that are needed for social interactions. Effective feedback on speaking skills from a phonetic and linguistic perspective is crucial for helping MLs improve their speaking abilities and enhance their understanding of others. However, tutors might have difficulties consulting in this new medium, and it is important for writing centers to provide leadership-focused training to tutors to equip them with the tools and confidence needed to offer speaking support (Book & Strawser, 2018). Though

some writing centers offer speaking consultations, only a few have an independent speaking program to support MLs. To empower MLs, a writing center at a large R1 research institution is implementing the Conversational Consultation (CC) project to train tutors to offer effective speaking feedback to provide more holistic guidance to MLs (García & Wei, 2014), which aligns with the broader goal of fostering leadership within writing centers by developing tutors' skills in supporting MLs' speaking and communication development.

The CC project is designed to prepare tutors to support MLs with six training lessons: 1) Vocabulary, 2) Inflection, 3) Pronunciation, 4) Pace, 5) Listening skills, and 6) Topics for Conversation. The first five lessons involve four sections: definitions of terminology, descriptions of MLs' learning needs, suggested consulting strategies, and scenario practice and reflections for tutors. The last lesson is designed to help tutors initiate conversations with MLs by offering icebreaker questions, allowing tutors to take the lead in guiding dialogues supportively.

The design of this leadership-driven project integrates linguistic and phonetic theories. For instance, Derwing and Munro's (2015) research stated that pronunciation and fluency are the major challenges for non-native speakers; pronunciation is important for communicating intelligibly (Newton & Nation, 2020). Ferris (2009) further underscores that feedback on speakers' lexical and phonetical errors in spoken communication is as critical as in writing. In addition, the CC project highlights the importance of listening skills, as Newton and Nation (2020) claimed that listening is a significant but overlooked skill in language learning for MLs. By equipping tutors to offer feedback on both speaking and listening, the CC project empowers them to facilitate MLs' overall language development, contributing to their confidence and academic success. These research findings highlight the importance and necessity of this service from writing centers.

During this presentation, the speaker, an ML, and an experienced peer consultant, will introduce research on the six lessons and foster discussion about consultation strategies regarding them. Peer consultants and administrators can reflect on the leadership roles they have to better support MLs' speaking skills and social communication within the context of the writing center. In sum, participants will explore how they can develop leadership strategies that empower tutors to support MLs inclusively.

References

Book, C., & Strawser, M. G. (2018). *Evolving identities: A case study of a writing center collaboration with a public speaking course*. The Peer Review. https://thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/issue-1/evolving-identities-a-case-study-of-a-writing-center-collaboration-with-a-public-speaking-course/.

Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2015). *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

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García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism and education.* Palgrave Macmillan.

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