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STATISTICAL BRIEF

How Quickly are California English Learners Reaching English Proficiency?

On March 25, 2003 the California Department of Education released figures from the second California English Language Development Test (CELDT) that was administered to all English learners in the fall of 2002. A press release issued with the figures trumpeted that gains in English language proficiency tripled over a one-year period compared to the same students who took the test in 2001. Several newspapers around the state ran headlines featuring the results and some attributed the gains to the passage of Proposition 227 that curtailed the use of bilingual instruction in California.

Have California English learners attained proficiency as quickly as the California Department of Education (CDE) figures seem to suggest? Are these gains a direct result of the passage of Proposition 227? A more careful examination of the CELDT data suggests the answer to both questions is no.

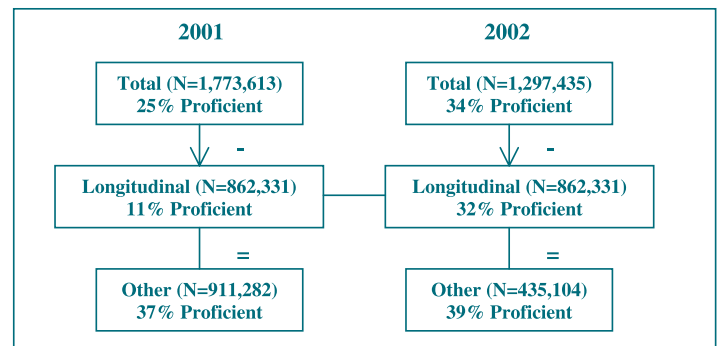
What does English Proficiency Mean?

Before addressing both questions, it is important to point out what the CELDT does and does not say about English proficiency. The CELDT is a single assessment designed to measure proficiency in oral and written English. According to guidelines issued by the California State Board of Education, proficiency on the CELDT alone is not sufficient to officially designate an English learner as Fluent English Proficient (FEP). Other criteria must also be used, including performance on achievement tests, teacher recommendations, and parental consent. Even when English learners are reclassified as FEP, it does not ensure that they attain proficiency on academic achievement tests at the same rate as English-only students. For example, only 30 percent of redesignated FEP students were deemed proficient on the 2002 ninth grade California Standards test in English Language Arts, compared to 40 percent of English-only students. So, results from the CELDT should not be used to make strong claims about English proficiency.

Are English Learners Attaining Proficiency that Quickly?

The increase in English proficiency trumpeted by the CDE was based on a longitudinal sample of 862,331 English learners who took the CELDT in 2002 and in 2001*. Among this group of students, 32 percent were proficient (scoring at the early advanced level or above) on the CELDT in 2002, compared to only 11 percent in 2001, a near tripling in a one-year period (see Figure).

But the longitudinal sample represented less than half of all the 1,773,613 English learners who were given the CELDT in 2001. What happened to the other 911,282 English learners?



We don't know for sure. Some of them—the ones with the highest proficiency scores—were undoubtedly reclassified as FEP and therefore were not given the 2002 CELDT. Yet according to CDE figures, only 117,450 students were reclassified as FEP between 2001 and 2002. Unless they left California, all these English learners were probably given the CELDT in 2002, but for some reason their 2001 scores were not reported. Since this “other” group of English learners is somewhat larger than the longitudinal group highlighted by the state, the only way to ascertain the overall growth in English proficiency for English learners in California is to examine the growth in English proficiency for both groups.

Unfortunately, we don't know the exact change in CELDT scores for this other group of English learners, but we can get some idea by removing the scores of the longitudinal group of students from the total reported CELDT scores in both years (see Figure). When we do that we find that 37 percent of the students in the other group scored at the proficient level on the CELDT in 2001 compared to 11 percent of the students in the longitudinal group. In other words, the initial scores of the students in the other group—the group not highlighted by the CDE—were much higher than the scores of the students that were highlighted. In 2002, 39 percent of the students in the other group scored at the proficient level, compared to 32 percent in the first group.

If we simply look at the overall scores in both years, we see that the *percentage* of English learners scoring at the proficient level increased more modestly from 25 percent to 34 percent, while the actual *number* of English learners at this level only increased by 14,554 (from 433,122 in 2001 to 447,676 in 2002). The reason the proportion looks so small in 2001 is that the test was administered over two academic years, so some students—especially kindergartners with low scores—were given the test

twice, which inflated the total number of students tested (the denominator). Nonetheless, there appears to be a definite improvement in the proficiency level of California's English learners, as one would expect.

Can These Changes be Attributed to Proposition 227?

Some newspapers attributed the improvement in English proficiency to the passage of Proposition 227 which passed in 1998, well before this apparent increase in test scores. Because there was no statewide English proficiency test in place before 2001, we really have no data to show whether students are doing better in acquiring English today than before the passage of Proposition 227. The only real data we have that speaks to this issue are the reclassification rates reported in the Language Census data, and here the state reports that reclassification has not grown more than about 1% per year since the passage of Proposition 227.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell was quoted in the San Francisco Chronicle as saying that these figures are evidence that "California is on the right track." We hope this is true, but the data that were reported do not prove this. This is an example, however, of how little care is often taken in reporting data, and how such data can grab headlines—even when inaccurate.

—Russell W. Rumberger and Patricia Gándara

**The current analysis is based on revised CELDT data released by the CDE on April 30, 2003.*

Additional 2003 Research Grant Awarded

The UCLMRI Faculty Steering Committee is pleased to announce that an additional Teacher Research Grant has been funded this year, under the February 2003 Call for Proposals. Following is the (edited) abstract submitted by the funded grantee.

TEACHER GRANT

Investigating and Improving Science Learning and Assessment for Middle School Linguistic Minority Students

MARCELLE A. SIEGEL, UC BERKELEY

GRANT #03CY-01TG-B

This project will investigate instruction and assessments for linguistic minority students in middle school life science classes in two San Diego schools.

The project team will explore instructional strategies for improving language skills and the use of these strategies as tools for enhancing students' understanding of science. This study will focus on ways to improve assessments to be more accessible and equitable for linguistic minority students (both English learners and fluent English proficient).

Our final report will include a practical guide describing tested assessment items, ways to alter assessment items, and findings from our evaluation.

DISSERTATION GRANT – FINAL REPORTS

The following are edited versions of abstracts from final reports filed by UC LMRI grant recipients. The complete abstracts, as well as full copies of the reports, are available through the UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database at: <http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations>.

Patterns of Language Processing and Growth in Early English-Spanish Bilingualism

BARBARA THERESE CONBOY, UC SAN DIEGO

GRANT #00-10DG-SD

Four studies explored patterns of language growth and processing in 19-31-month old bilingual children acquiring English and Spanish.

The first study revealed significant relationships between vocabulary size and grammatical development, replicating previous studies with monolingual children. In the second study, performance on English and Spanish sentence repetition tests was compared for bilingual and monolingual children matched for vocabulary size in each language.

In the third study, event-related potentials (ERPs) were used to investigate the neural activity of bilingual children as they processed known and unknown words. In the fourth study, the effects of mixed vs. blocked language testing conditions on ERP patterns were investigated.

The results of these four studies support experience-based accounts of early language acquisition, and further establish the use of combined behavioral-neural imaging approaches for studying language development in bilingual toddlers.

Belonging in School: The Politics of Race, Class, and Citizenship in the Pajaro Valley School District

CLAYTON A. HURD, UC SANTA CRUZ

GRANT #00-06DG-SC

This dissertation is concerned with transformations in the schooling conditions and the experiences of Mexican-descent youth in California schools since the 1970s.

Rather than focusing primarily on shifts in educational policy at the national and state level, the study provides an ethnographic portrait of a predominantly bimodal (Mexican-descent/white) school district on California's central coast.

This analysis provides the background for a recent effort by the predominantly white residential community to secede from the increasingly Latino school district. The secession movement, following closely on the heels of California's "anti-immigrant" Proposition 187, is a reflection of the current state and national climate regarding questions of desegregation and class and racial entitlement.

Though the high school has a strong academic program, a competent teaching staff, and a host of extracurricular opportunities, Mexican-descent students fail to benefit from these resources in the ways white students do.

My fieldwork makes it clear that though the phenomenon of Latino underachievement in public schools may be national in scope, it is locally produced.

Role of Phonological Awareness and Decoding Skill in Second Language Learning

GAYANE MESCHYAN, *UCSB*

GRANT #02-02CY-09DG-SB

The present dissertation thesis examined the predictive role of phonological awareness and decoding skills in second language (L2) learning. The result of good phonological awareness and decoding skills is the ability to form accurate sound representations of spoken and written words, respectively, which was predicted to facilitate second language learning.

Study 1 examined the role of native language (English) decoding skills in predicting second language (Spanish) learning.

Study 2 tested theoretical models of L2 reading comprehension success, while also examining the role of L1 (Spanish) skills in higher-level L2 (English) abilities.

Both models found that the two most important skills for L2 reading comprehension success are L2 decoding accuracy and L2 vocabulary skill. These findings suggest that improving these skills in English learners can improve their English (L2) reading comprehension skills.

INDIVIDUAL (SMALL) GRANT – FINAL REPORT

The Community Practice of Teasing Among Latino Children Living in the U.S.

LUCINDA PEASE-ALVAREZ, *UC SANTA CRUZ*

GRANT #00-02G-SC

We examined the teasing practices that involved Latino children in two community settings in California: an after-school program involving children and UCSC undergraduates, and a summer youth program serving the same group of children.

Preliminary analyses of data sources (i.e., interviews, undergraduates' fieldnotes and other writings, videotaped follows of children) demonstrated that children of various ages engaged in many types of teasing. While teasing, children tended to be content and productively engaged in ongoing activity, often in the context of multiparty interactions.

In highlighting aspects of participation that differ from what has been documented in research among middle-class populations, this work underscores the sociocultural nature of development.

NEW! HOT OFF THE PRESS!

Ensayos de lengua y pedagogia is the newest book published by UCLMRI entirely in Spanish. Edited by Faculty Steering Committee member Giorgio Perissinotto of UCSB, it is now available at no cost through our web site. Visit our *Research Dissemination* page for information on this book as well as our other free publications.

NEW! RESEARCH REPORTS ON WILLIAMS LAWSUIT PUBLISHED

The Institute for Democracy, Education, & Access (IDEA) at UCLA has published a series of research reports on the current conditions in California schools and considered possible alternatives for ensuring adequate and equal opportunities for learning for all students. The reports, prepared in response to the lawsuit, *Williams v. State of California*, are available at: <http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/williams/index.html>.

One of the reports, *The Inequitable Treatment of English Learners in California's Public Schools*, was prepared by Patricia Gándara and Russell W. Rumberger. Gándara and Rumberger presented the results of this report at the WestEd Board of Directors meeting in San Francisco on March 27th in San Francisco and at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association on April 21st in Chicago as part of an invited symposium on the Williams lawsuit.

2003 ANNUAL CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS



San Diego's Mission Bay

UC LMRI's 16th Annual Conference was held May 9-10th at the Catamaran Resort Hotel in San Diego, California. Approximately 100 attendees participated in sessions focusing on The Assessment of English Learners. The conference featured more than 25 presenters in nine sessions on topics such as The

Academic Achievement of English Learners, Preparing Teachers to Help English Learners Meet Standards, and Educating English Learners with Special Needs.

Charlene Rivera, Ed.D. was the keynote speaker opening the conference on Friday afternoon. Her presentation topic was "Making State Assessments Accessible to English Language Learners: Why Test Accommodations Matter." On Friday evening, guests were treated to a luau-themed dinner and a complimentary after dinner cruise on San Diego's Mission Bay on the Catamaran Resort's Bahia Belle Sternwheeler.

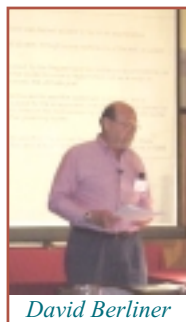
Saturday's sessions concluded with Arizona State University's David Berliner presenting a provocative keynote address on "Problems with High-Stakes Testing? Let Me Count the Ways..."

A photo gallery, selected presenter handouts and the official 2003 Conference program are all available on our web site.

Save The Date! At the last UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee meeting, Santa Barbara was chosen as the site for the May 2004 conference! Updates available on our web site as they occur.



Charlene Rivera



David Berliner

Education Policy Center News

UC LMRI established an Education Policy Center at UC Davis in 1997 to disseminate research findings to policymakers. The Center sponsors research and colloquia on policy issues in the education of English learners.

* * *

On April 17th **Dr. Jan Mayer**, Director of the Language and Leadership Office of the California Department of Education, presented an overview of support services CDE offers districts in the assessment of ELs under NCLB. Dr. Mayer presented her hour-long session to a number of educators and researchers from local districts, and from surrounding universities.

On May 7th **Dr. Charlene Rivera** of George Washington University presented her research regarding accommodations for ELs in large scale assessments. Dr. Rivera fielded questions on the impact of NCLB on assessment in the states from legislative staff, policy makers, district assessment and evaluation directors, EL coordinators, and a variety of educators, from both local districts and universities. Each of the seminars was followed by dinner and informal conversation.

The Policy Center has also been working with **Senator Deborah Ortiz** on the new **St. Hope Charter School in Sacramento**. It had been Senator Ortiz' desire to see a dual immersion program go into the charter school to serve the large population of English learners in the area and the Center has been developing a design for such a program.

Policy Center Coordinator, **Rebecca Callahan** has also been busy making presentations on her work on secondary English learners. On May 3rd, Rebecca presented, *Academic achievement of secondary ELs: Is it language, or is it learning?* at the Fourth International Symposium on Bilingualism (ISB4) held at Arizona State University. Then on May 9th she presented, *Tracking and English language proficiency: The academic achievement of high school English Learners*, at the UC LMRI Annual conference in San Diego.

* * *

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