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Newsletters

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GRANT REPORT

How Peers Shape Behavior and Impede Learning English in High School

This report provides an account of some of the critical challenges facing Mexican-descent English language learners at a comprehensive, bimodal (Mexican-descent/Anglo) suburban high school in Northern California. The study employed an ethnographic approach to more fully understand why Mexican-descent students from similar family and community backgrounds pursued different academic paths in high school. Drawing from one full academic year observing English Language Development (ELD) classes, we explored the complex peer interactions that created difficulty for students to comfortably practice English and to demonstrate active interest in class lessons. These politics affected both boys and girls in the class, although the situations and challenges were somewhat different.

The study identified three phenomena in the ELD classes that resulted in non-compliance or student disengagement from learning: (1) classroom “acting out” practices by some male students, (2) invocations of the term “schoolboy” to police the behavior of other boys, and (3) teasing among English language learners—both male and female—in relation to “correctness” in the use and pronunciation of spoken English.

In an effort to make sense of the “acting out” practices of some of the Mexican-descent boys in ELD classes, we went beyond asking questions about why students act out in class (which students tended to talk about in negative terms) to consider the kinds of meaningful and pleasurable activities in which they invested and that may help explain their behavior in class. The ethnographic data suggested that social interactions among peers produced and constantly reestablished—through everyday performative modes—particular hegemonic sensibilities about masculinity that compelled some Mexican-descent boys to be at odds with classroom learning. Many boys invested in or were allured by a particular set of meaningful cultural practices—*choleando*, being seen as “bad”—which, though pleasurable for the high status they conferred, limited the range of expressions boys could exhibit and remain boys in good

standing (of high status) within important social networks. Although all students certainly did not collectively engage in disruptive behaviors in the class, many girls nevertheless saw themselves as contributing to the unproductive environment, not through public displays of disruption, but by not paying attention [*poniendo atención*]. Given an unwillingness to directly challenge boys’ disruptive behavior, they expressed feelings of guilt and shared responsibility for the “disastrous and disorganized” nature of the classes.

To understand the existence of teasing among Mexican-descent students in relation to their “correctness” in using English—and how this teasing acts so powerfully on English language learners—we contextualize such teasing historically within the larger politics of language, immigration, and citizenship in the Southwest United States. Academic challenges facing Mexican-descent English language learners result, in part, from the way in which broader forces of gender, class, and racial discrimination and exploitation play out in *internal* relations of power, privilege, and status among Mexican-descent students themselves.

Student commentaries in this study demonstrate that speaking English, as well as learning English, became a very emotional dilemma for ELD students. They felt multiple layers of subordination from both their white and Mexican-descent classmates. Despite a strong desire to learn English and excel in school generally, learning English and engaging in other contexts of formal learning at the school became inseparable from the pressures of social relations at the school, the experience of extreme marginality, the disorder in the classes, and inappropriate instruction. An important finding of this study is that for Mexican-descent ELD students at Hillside High, learning the English language is a social and interpersonal process rather than a primarily psychological or linguistic one.

This study suggests that while schools are not wholly responsible for the difficulties these ELD students face in learning English and achieving academic success, they are significantly implicated in perpetuating those difficulties in at

least three ways: first, for failing to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction between students from different racial and linguistic backgrounds; second, by supporting the construction of particular sensibilities about masculinity that compel “acting out” performances among some boys; and, third, by maintaining policies of ability grouping, tracking, and other forms of “disciplinary measures” that communicate implicit judgments about students as individuals and as members of identifiable groups and perpetuate inequalities by emphasizing differences among groups.

The analysis in this article suggests that in order to more effectively serve Mexican-descent students, schools must both recognize the mutually constituted forms of social difference that exist among their students and take active steps to mitigate the schooling practices that perpetuate those differences.

—Clayton A. Hurd and Margaret A. Gibson
UC Santa Cruz

NOTE: This abstract is based on the Final Report of the UC LMRI Small Research Grant Award, “Different Paths Taken: The Divergent Academic Experiences of English Language Learners during High School,” which is available on the UC LMRI website at: (<http://lmri.ucsb.edu/resact/2/tocgrantreports.htm>)

Additional 2002 Research Grants Awarded

The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee has awarded two additional research grants this year.

Following are the abstracts submitted by the funded grantees (some have been edited for length due to space considerations).

DISSERTATION GRANT

Writing Development of First Year Immigrant Students

ANN GO, UC DAVIS

The purpose of this research is to study the writing development of first year immigrant students at the upper elementary levels. Newcomer students are particularly vulnerable during their first year of education in our public schools. It is important that educators provide adequate support to prevent these students from becoming at-risk or dropout students. In order to provide effective instruction, research is needed to learn about the literacy development of the newcomer students during their first few years of schooling.

This research will conduct qualitative case studies with a focus on written discourse analysis to study the writing development of newcomer students at the upper elementary level. In summary, this research study is intended to document the writing development of first year immigrant students through text analysis, and to identify literacy practices in the classrooms and at home that may influence the writing development of the newcomer students.

TEACHER GRANT

Investigating Indicators of Academic Achievement for K-12 English Learners: Continuing and Disseminating the Work of a Teacher Research Group

PAM CASTORI, UC DAVIS

This research grant will offer continuing support for a cohort of eight experienced teacher researchers (representing seven school districts) recruited from the CRESS Teacher Research Community. Each member of this cohort teaches in a K-12 classroom, with at least 50% English Learners (EL) and has committed to investigating issues related to academic achievement for their EL students.

Funds through this grant will enable the teachers to continue their studies, if necessary, into the Fall of 2002; support collaborative work with a publications consultant to edit their studies and generate a publication that may be distributed through CRESS and LMRI networks; and prepare proposals to present results of their teacher research at the 2003 annual conferences of AERA, CAFE and NABE.

UC LMRI Awards First Postdoctoral Fellowship

UC LMRI is pleased to announce its first postdoctoral fellowship to **Dr. Julie Maxwell-Jolly**. Dr. Maxwell-Jolly received her Ph.D. from UC Davis in November 2001 with Professor Patricia Gándara serving as her dissertation chair. Dr. Maxwell-Jolly's dissertation focused on understanding how



Dr. Julie Maxwell-Jolly

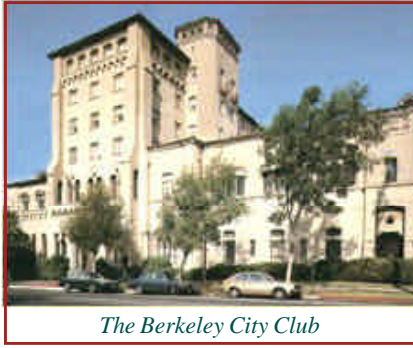
teachers make decisions about what to do when presented with a policy they do not agree with. Her postdoctoral fellowship will support a study of the current employment situation and post-227 professional experiences of bilingual (BCLAD) teachers in California. Kris Gutiérrez, Professor of Education at UCLA and a member of the UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee, will serve as Dr. Maxwell-Jolly's mentor during the six-month fellowship from April 1 to September 30.

15th Annual Conference Highlights

The 15th Annual UC LMRI Conference was held May 3-4, 2002 at the beautiful and historic Berkeley City Club in Berkeley, CA.

The theme for this year's conference was **Rethinking the Teaching Profession for English Learners**, focusing on the preparation and professional development of teachers for English learners.

Approximately 160 attendees took part in twenty-two presentations, one panel and two keynote addresses. The audience included nearly 100 teachers and instructors, and most conference rooms were at full capacity.



The Berkeley City Club

Though registration closed days before the conference began, UC LMRI staff members ensured that those who registered on-site were admitted and had full access to the conference presentations, albeit at

standing room only for some sessions.

Conference highlights included: The opening address given by **Guadalupe Valdés** (Stanford University) on the “Monolingual Bias in American Education: Implications for Linguistic Minority Students and Their Teachers.”

Some of the more highly attended included: *Professional Development for Teachers of English Learners*, which included “Avoiding the ELD Drive-Thru: Improving the Educational Achievement of English Learners Through Quality Professional Development” by **Zenaida Aguirre-Munoz** (UCLA/CRESST), and “Professional Development for Teachers of English Learners: UCLA-UCB Institutes on English Language Development and Mathematics Education (ELD-MC Institutes) by **Concepcion Valadez** (UCLA).

Also well-attended were sessions on: *Literacy Development of English Learners*, which included presentations by **Jessica Villaruz** (UCSB) on “The Value of Intensive Phonological Intervention for Spanish-Speaking Students at Risk for Reading Failure in English”; **George Bunch** (Stanford University) on “From Testing the Trivial to Understanding the Complex: Measuring Oral Proficiency in Academic Language”; and **Myriam Casimir** (UC Berkeley/WestEd) on “Bilingual Minority 6th Graders ‘Doing Bilingualism’ in Dual Immersion and English Language Classrooms.”



Keynote Speakers Lily Wong Fillmore and Guadalupe Valdés

Friday evening ended with an after-dinner panel conducted by representatives of Californians Together who gave an update on *Legislation Affecting English Learners*.

Lily Wong Fillmore concluded the conference after lunch on Saturday with a well-received address entitled, “What Do Teachers Need to Know About Language to Prepare Linguistic Minority Students for High-Stakes Tests?”

For a copy of the conference program listing all presenters and their topics, as well as conference photos and a selection of presenter handouts/slide presentations, please visit our website at: (<http://lmri.ucsb.edu/profdev/tocprofdev.htm>)

Education Policy Center News

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and we have testified twice in the Senate in this spring - once on the problems of the current accountability system for English learners in the Senate Education Committee, and once in Senate Appropriations on the need for provisions in SB 1665. We have also met regularly with committee staff in Sacramento to advise on the development of several bills affecting English learners.

Patricia Gándara just returned from a forum for journalists at Harvard University in which she spoke on the need for “enlightened” language policy in the U.S. and is returning the first of June to participate in a forum on English learners geared to educating journalists once again on the impact of Proposition 227 in California.

The voters in Massachusetts go to the polls this fall to vote on an **Unz** initiative there. On June 4 the Center is sponsoring a presentation and “policy dinner” by **Jamal Abedi** of the Center for the Study of Evaluation at UCLA on High Stakes Testing and English learners. We will follow up later in the month with a presentation on the failure of California’s accountability system to incorporate English learners (and what we should do about this) in southern California at the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) conference.

This summer we will be working on two projects: under the guidance of **Kris Gutiérrez** at UCLA, **Julie Maxwell-Jolly** will be studying the impact of Proposition 227 on bilingual teachers - where have they gone and what are they doing? And, **Rebecca Callahan**, the new coordinator for the Center will be examining the CELDT and how well it measures the English proficiency of secondary students.

The new School of Education at UC Davis is poised to launch an Institute on Education Policy, Governance and Law in the fall. The UC LMRI Policy Center will be an important component of the new institute, helping all institute researchers to incorporate English learners into their studies on education policy.

Education Policy Center News

The Education Policy Center at UC Davis has been in a particularly active period over the last few months. **Julie Maxwell-Jolly**, who coordinated the Center for four years, finished her dissertation and left the position. **Rebecca Callahan**, a Ph.D. student at UC Davis, is taking over the position. Rebecca has been a bilingual teacher and administrator in northern California, and she is studying the predictiveness of track placement and English proficiency on English learner grades and test scores. Policy in this state is based on the belief that the academic performance of English learners is almost solely a function of English language proficiency. Rebecca thinks it may be more related to the courses they are assigned to. Stay tuned and we will let you know what she finds!

We have been working on a report with UC LMRI Director **Russ Rumberger** on *The Inequitable Education of English Learners in California*, which should be ready for debut soon.

The Latino Caucus of the California legislature has also recently announced a legislative priority on English learners,

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University of California
 Linguistic Minority Research Institute
 South Hall, Room 4722
 Santa Barbara, CA 93106-3220

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