

UC Berkeley

Newsletters

Title

Fall 2006

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/52c0w0mq>

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Publication Date

2006-09-01



Are California's Reading Textbooks Adequate for Teaching English Learners?

For two centuries, reading instruction in public schools has been guided by the *basal readers*, systems of materials created by publishers for adoption by the state's schools. These systems define for teachers from kindergarten through middle school what to teach, how to teach it, and how to assess learning.

In 2002 the California State Board of Education adopted textbook programs that required publishers to meet the specific needs of English learners (ELs) in order to ensure "universal access" to the language arts curriculum within the regular classroom setting. Publishers of the two reading series adopted by the Board, *Open Court* and *Houghton Mifflin*, responded to the mandate with four sets of supplements, including one for ELs, as part of the basal system. The publishers and the state also provided professional development in the use of the basals, including attention to the supplements.

This study reviewed the Teacher's Edition (TE) and the EL Supplement for the two reading series, and interviewed a sample of 57 elementary teachers about their use of the supplements and their experiences with the professional development in support of them.

Findings

Three findings emerged from the study:

1. The materials offered little specific EL assistance to students or teachers, and what was offered was contrary to best practice.

The TE or Basic Program provided small "boxes" directing teachers to the supplement. The supplements were designed to address the special needs of EL students by having teachers allocate additional time for "pre-teaching" these students, with an emphasis on basic skills. The supplements offered sound principles for instructing EL students, but the actual lessons did not incorporate these ideas. Instead, EL students were treated as low-achievers, to be provided with "more of the same" (or, arguably, "more of less"). The EL principles (and TE lessons) emphasize attention to high-level skills and acquisition of academic language, while the supplements offered low-level practice on basic skills.

2. The professional development for EL instruction was limited in both time and scope.

Across a range of workshops—by publishers, districts, and the state—the emphasis was on the TE mainstream, presented as a comprehensive research-based literacy program. According to participants, the supplements were not a central feature of any professional development activities.

3. The "supplement strategy" mandated by the Board was practically unworkable.

The strategy required teachers, already overwhelmed by the Basic Program, to juggle time and students across five different manuals. Many found the supplements useful for worksheets and "spot"

lessons, but disregarded advice from the supplements to pre-teach. Virtually none of the teachers employed any of the supplements in the ways that the Board and/or the publishers intended.

In short, the supplements did not fulfill the intentions of policy makers. Teachers followed the mainstream basal (sometimes under strict pacing guidelines mandated by the school district), often relying on supplements developed by other publishers for EL students, rather than the mandated supplements.

Recommendations

Four recommendations emerged from review of the materials and discussions with teachers:

First, *design an instructional support system* that helps teachers deal with student diversity, including real-life examples that are connected to specific lessons in the TE, rather than building a parallel system to the TE.

Second, *directly address the issues of effective instruction for EL students*, attending to both the primary language and level of English competence.

Third, *advise how to manage student differences and time allocation*. The current TE offers general guidance in these areas, but the actual lessons follow a "peas in a pod" model.

Fourth, *develop a program of ongoing professional development* that provides teachers with hands-on experience in dealing with general and specific issues of universal access, including EL students. The ideal would comprise a single integrated instructional support system.

The California State Board of Education recently adopted new regulations for Reading and Language Arts textbooks. The regulations emphasize time allocations, requiring 2.5 hours of instruction in the primary grades, plus an hour or more for students with special needs. Publishers must integrate universal access support into the TE, and also provide supplements to assist EL students and struggling readers, and for vocabulary support.

Despite the comprehensiveness of these criteria, they do little to address the problems revealed in our analysis. The next round of textbook adoptions will have new packaging, but teachers of EL students will continue to struggle to promote their growth in acquiring academic language. The current TEs—the Basic Program—provide excellent examples of challenging literacy instruction. The EL introductions offer sound research-based principles for supporting EL students with the Basic Program. The challenge for the future is to embed these principles into the Basic Program and to provide a comprehensive program of ongoing professional development.

—Robert Calfee

This cover story is based on the final report for UCLMRI Individual Research Grant #04-04CY-01IG-R. The complete report is available on the UC LMRI web site.

Research Grant Awarded

The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee has funded one Dissertation Grant from the October 2006 Call for Proposals. This award is for \$15,000 to be completed over one year.

DISSERTATION GRANT AWARD

The Effects of Vocabulary Instruction on Young English Learners at Risk for Reading Disabilities

PI: ALEXIS FILIPPINI, UC SANTA BARBARA
DISSERTATION GRANT #07-06CY-01DG-SB
FUNDED: OCTOBER 2006

This study investigates the effectiveness of adding vocabulary instruction to a basic skills (phonological awareness and decoding) early reading intervention for first grade English learners (EL) in a Title I, Program Improvement school in southern California.

The primary aim of this study is to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a vocabulary-added intervention with the goal of improving early reading comprehension without sacrificing early word-level reading skills. The sample will comprise approximately 100 first grade ELs instructed in English Immersion, who speak Spanish as a first language, randomly assigned to instructional condition.

This study addresses a critical issue for the growing number of ELs served by California's public schools: identifying components of efficient early reading intervention in order to maximize student outcomes in a limited instructional period.

UC LMRI RESEARCH GRANT: FINAL REPORT ABSTRACT

Academic Literacy in the Literature Classroom: Investigating Instructional Decisions of New Teachers of English Learners

PI: PAULINE HOLMES, UC DAVIS
DISSERTATION GRANT #05-05CY-03DG-D
COMPLETED: OCTOBER 2006

This longitudinal case study examines the perspectives and instructional practices of two new English teachers who have been prepared to teach academic literacy in a preservice program dedicated to improved instruction for English learners. Survey results about levels of confidence in the teaching of literature and academic English to secondary English learners were used to identify teachers who had moved successfully through the teacher education program and continued to report confidence in their teaching.

Significant insights drawn from this study include: (1) the new teachers were able to teach academic English to English learners in the context of response to literature, (2) their instruction was positively influenced by the principles and practices they acquired during their teacher preparation programs, (3) Scarcella's (2003) framework describing dimensions of academic language provided

a useful structure for analysis of the teaching. The teachers' instructional goals were compromised at times by the required curriculum in their schools, but their understanding of academic language helped them design and implement lessons to include components of English necessary for meaningful response to literature and to their English learners' future academic careers.

2007 Research Grants Call for Proposals

Deadline: February 1, 2007

UC LMRI encourages University of California researchers to undertake comprehensive and collaborative research that improves the schooling conditions and academic achievement of language minority youth by increasing our understanding of the challenges they face as well as the resources they represent for the state.

Funding is provided annually in four grant categories:

- * **Individual Research Grants** for UC researchers (one year awards of up to \$25,000)
- * **Dissertation Research Grants** for UC graduate students (one year awards of up to \$15,000)
- * **Collaborative Research Grants** for teams of UC and CSU researchers (multi-year awards of up to \$50,000)
- * **Teacher Research Grants** for teams of UC researchers and California school teachers (one year awards of up to \$25,000)

Funding priority is given to proposals that focus on Biliteracy, Educational Achievement, and California. For detailed information and grant applications, visit the UC LMRI web site.

"Immigrants, Education, and Language"

UC LMRI's
20th Annual Conference

Co-sponsored by
Arizona State University's
Mary Lou Fulton College of Education

Keynote Speakers:
Norma Gonzalez, University of Arizona
Peter Roos, META

May 3-5, 2007
on the Tempe campus of ASU
Tempe, AZ

LMRI NEWS



Giorgio Perissinotto



Jin Sook Lee



Laura Sterponi

Faculty Steering Committee Changes

The Faculty Steering Committee is the primary intercampus advisory group to the UC LMRI. Members of the Faculty Steering Committee represent each of the ten UC campuses and serve renewable three-year terms.

The Steering Committee provides oversight of UC LMRI activities and is responsible for setting long-term goals, reviewing the annual plan and progress of the Institute, and advising the Director on policy. Recent changes to the Steering Committee are noted below.

Giorgio Perissinotto, representing UC Santa Barbara on the committee since 1998, has stepped down to become the Director of the UCSB Education Abroad Program's Study Center in Madrid, Spain from January 1, 2007 through December 31, 2009.

Jin Sook Lee, Assistant Professor in the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, has agreed to serve on the Committee as the new member from UCSB. Her three-year appointment is through 2009.

Laura Sterponi, Assistant Professor, Language and Literacy, Society and Culture, has been selected to serve as the new member from UC Berkeley. Her three-year appointment is through 2009.

Kenji Hakuta (*UC Merced*) has been reappointed through 2007, while **Robin Scarcella** (*UC Irvine*) and **Adalberto Aguirre** (*UC Riverside*)—who was recently elected Chair of the UCR Sociology Department—have been reappointed for three-year terms, ending in 2009.

And finally, **Patricia Gándara**, Associate Director of UC LMRI and Director of the UC LMRI Education Policy Center at UC Davis, has taken a position with UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies beginning January 1, 2007. Gándara will continue to direct the Policy Center, and support for the Center through UC Davis will also continue to be provided.

2005-06 Annual Report Released

UC LMRI's 2005-06 Annual Report, published in October 2006, features informative data spotlighting the substantial accomplishments of the Institute, both historically and over the past year.

Highlights from this year's Annual Report:

- Since its inception in 1984, UC LMRI has awarded **162 grants** worth more than **\$2.5 million** to 130 faculty and

students throughout the UC system; these grants have generated **166 publications** and over **\$8 million** in reported **extramural funding**

- Grants awarded in 2005-06 totaled **\$69,875**
- More than **45,000 copies** of UC LMRI publications were downloaded from the web site in 2005-06
- Traffic to the UC LMRI site has grown from an average of 2,259 **unique visitors** per month in 1998-99, to an average of **13,307** in 2005-06
- UC LMRI's Dissertation Grants Program has funded **42 UC graduate students** since 1997
- In 2005-06 UC LMRI published **13 final grant reports, 2 EL Facts, 1 Technical Report, 1 Policy Report, and 4 newsletters**

The full report and appendix, featuring detailed information and historical tables, is available on the UC LMRI web site.

New EL Facts Published

EL Facts are statistical briefs summarizing data on English learners, their teachers, and their schooling experiences. The seventh publication in this series, "*Dropout Rates by Native Language, Race/Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status*" is now available on the UC LMRI web site.

INTRODUCING:

Visiting Scholar

In August 2006, **Jeff MacSwan**, Associate Professor in the Mary Lou Fulton College of Education at Arizona State University, was invited to be UC LMRI's 2006-07 Visiting Scholar. While on sabbatical leave from ASU, MacSwan will be involved in a number of research projects, including work related to a recently completed IES-funded study which empirically examines the role of language in theories of academic achievement differences among English learners.

New Staff Members

In June 2006, UC LMRI welcomed two new staff members: Student Assistant **James Young** is an undergraduate transfer from Diablo Valley College, majoring in Computer Engineering. **Joshua Bouganim**, currently in his third year studying Computer Engineering at UCSB, is UC LMRI's Computer Tech Support student.



Jeff MacSwan



Joshua Bouganim



James Young

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. More news and activities can be found on the UC LMRI web site.

Bill Increases Instructional Resources for EL Teachers

During the recently completed California state legislative session, **Patricia Gándara** and **Julie Maxwell-Jolly** testified on behalf of a bill to increase the professional development opportunities available for teachers of English learners. Although, in the end, the bill did not result in the program and activity originally intended, it did lead to an increase in resources dedicated to providing teachers with opportunities to improve their English learner instructional skills (as part of **SB 472**).

Biliteracy Network

The most recent Biliteracy Network meeting, held September 28, 2006, featured speaker **Martha Zaragoza-Diaz**, legislative consultant and lobbyist for the California Association of Bilingual Educators and Californians Together. She provided a review of the recently ended legislative session with regard to English learner-related education legislation and projected issues that will be important in the upcoming session. **Julie Maxwell-Jolly** also reported on a soon-to-be-released paper resulting from two conferences organized by the Education Policy Center at UC Davis in April and May 2005 and sponsored by the Hewlett Foundation. The conferences focused on providing instruction promoting academic English among secondary English language learners.

The next Biliteracy Network meeting will be held on Thursday, November 30, 2006. For more information, please contact **Sandra Mercuri** at smercuri@ucdavis.edu.

Davis EL Program Evaluation Completed, Results Presented

On October 19, 2006, the Education Policy Center made a presentation to the **Davis Joint Unified School District Board of Education**, reporting on the Center's year-long, in-depth study of EL programs in the district. The investigation comprised detailed analyses of quantitative data, including a longitudinal analysis of dropouts and CAHSEE passage, as well as qualitative research including classroom observations, surveys, and interviews. This has been an exciting opportunity to analyze a school system in depth, make recommendations, and now work with the district on implementing those recommendations. Much of the research on this project was conducted by graduate students **Cecilia Gómez** and **Lina Méndez-Benavídez**, who received a grant in support of her work from the UCD School of Education Cooperative Research and Extension Services for Schools (CRESS) Center (<http://education.ucdavis.edu/cress/>).

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Reports in This Issue

The UC LMRI Newsletter features abstracts from UC LMRI Research Grant Award recipients and—as they are completed—the abstracts from their Final Grant Reports.

Complete copies of UC LMRI-funded Final Grant Reports can be found on the UC LMRI web site. (Abstracts featured in the newsletter are edited for space considerations.)

Dissertation Grant Reports can be found on the UMI ProQuest Digital Dissertations Database at: <http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9993004>.

Back Issues: Newsletters from 1992 to the present are archived on the UC LMRI web site. A limited number of hard copies are available by request.

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