

UC Berkeley **Newsletters**

Title

Summer 2003

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/58n222cf>

Author

UC Language Minority Research Institute

Publication Date

2003-06-01



GRANT REPORT

Teacher Researchers Investigating Successful Strategies for Educating English Learners

What can teacher researchers discover about achievement indicators for their English learners, and how can what they learn make a difference beyond their own classrooms? This is a question our study set out to investigate two years ago as a UC LMRI-sponsored group of teacher researchers began its work. The goal of this collaborative teacher research team was to systematically investigate indicators of achievement for EL students (not including data associated with high-stakes testing) and to organize the teacher research studies in a way that would be of interest to classroom teachers as well as educational researchers and policy makers.

The group, consisting of eight experienced teacher researchers who work in classrooms composed of at least 50% English learners, was recruited by and collaborated with faculty from the Center for Cooperative Research and Extension Services for Schools (CRESS) at UC Davis. Individual research questions were generated based on the teachers' own student populations, curricular goals, observations, and burning issues. Each of the teacher research studies address a particular setting, a research question, methods, results, and conclusions. Teachers worked on their studies within the context of their local teacher research groups and also met as a cohort throughout the two years at UC Davis.

All the studies were guided by a common premise: *multiple measures of academic achievement are needed for English learners*. Because of the overwhelming challenges facing California's English learners, their success in school has become increasingly difficult. Many of these challenges are associated with high-stakes testing. Alternative approaches to documenting and demonstrating academic achievement for English learners are sorely needed. These collaborative research investigations document and articulate challenges as well as successes and insights into teaching and alternative assessment approaches that can lead to success for English learners. Four of the studies focus on language literacy, two emphasize academic literacy, and two investigate programmatic factors that enable or inhibit achievement. Abstracts and the teacher research reports are available in our final report.

Why Teacher Research?

Teacher research is the systematic and intentional inquiry about teaching, learning, and schooling carried out by teachers in their

own schools and classroom settings. It is research conducted by teachers as they go about their daily work and is enmeshed in the context of the classroom and school. Teacher research offers opportunities for the educational field to learn first hand from reflective practitioners as they challenge their own practices and assumptions about teaching and learning. These contextualized inquiries can be insightful and extremely useful to teachers and to the educational community at large. We believe the questions, knowledge, practices, and struggles documented by teacher

researchers should play an important role in offering avenues to improve classroom practice and in helping to shape the research agendas and policy decisions for the growing population of English learners. The studies generated by this teacher research

group can contribute to knowledge about how teachers assess, support, and promote achievement for English learners.

Results from Cross-Study Analysis

After the studies were completed, our collaborative research team analyzed the complete set of teacher research studies for themes related to the teachers, teaching, students, and learning involved. This process resulted in several key assertions that are discussed in some detail in our final report. One significant crosscutting theme was: *Institutional Circumstances/Constraints*. Institutional circumstances and constraints were faced by all of the teachers as they struggled to deliver the most appropriate and effective instruction to their EL students. Some examples included: inappropriate placement and scheduling of students; scripted curricula; a "one-size-fits-all" context for instructional delivery and assessment; inappropriate text choice; continuous changes in programs; lack of assistance; and flawed use of standardized tests. These constraints collectively represented the contexts in which teachers attempted to modify, adjust, create, intervene, and comply. They did so by generating their own teaching strategies to target the academic/social needs and interests of their students.

The second significant crosscutting theme was *Teaching Strategies/Interventions*. Strategies and interventions were the tools designed, tested, and employed by the teachers in an attempt to raise student achievement. Approaches included: strategies for writing, oral language, language routines and silent reading; increasing parent involvement; identifying and using role models; making students' voices heard by modifying assignments and

"We believe the questions, knowledge, practices, and struggles documented by teacher researchers should play an important role...in helping to shape the research agendas and policy decisions for...English learners."

assessment approaches; and making the curriculum relevant to students' lives. We considered the teaching strategies to be closely linked with, and in many cases in response to, the institutional circumstances/constraints and recommend that this relationship be studied further.

Conclusion

On its own, each UC LMRI teacher research study says something specific about the way a particular teacher investigated, learned about, and attempted to improve achievement for EL students. Approaches to documenting interventions and their impact on student achievement are central to the studies. However, as a collection the studies were also very successful at articulating and raising teachers' and students' voices about what it means to teach EL students and what it means to be an English learner—voices that clearly relate challenges, hopes, frustrations, and successes.

We suggest the teacher and student voices and perspectives articulated through teacher research efforts like the ones supported through UC LMRI deserve a respected place in the discourse and decision-making arenas for EL education. Moreover, looking systematically across studies from different networks may reveal new insights and opportunities for improving education.

—Pam Castori

with Oneta Edmonds, Shirley Fagout, Carol Halbe, Heera Kulkarni, Janet Papale, Michelle Parsons, Nancy Salm, and FaraLee Wright

The cover story is an edited abstract from the final report filed by UC LMRI grant recipient Pam Castori (Grant #01-02TG-D). The unedited abstract and complete report are available on the UC LMRI web site.

Individual Grant Awarded

The UC LMRI Steering Committee has selected an additional—and final—proposal for funding from the February 2003 Grant Call. The (edited) abstract submitted by the grant awardee follows.

INDIVIDUAL GRANT

In My Place: Contexts of Schools in Mathematics and Their Effect on English Language Learners in Comparison With Their English Fluent Peers

FAITH G. PAUL, UC DAVIS

GRANT #03-03CY-07IG-D

Where a person is located in a social structure can be as important and sometimes more important than how an individual performs in that social structure for shaping subsequent opportunity. We examine the re-tracking of Algebra 1 in five inner-city high schools with a large proportion of English language learners to observe how this curricular structure serves as a multi-level bridge to subsequent enrollments in higher level mathematics courses, in biology, chemistry, and physics, and the full set of core college prep courses required by California State University and the

University of California.

Preliminary findings indicate that where English language learners are enrolled within the re-tracked Algebra 1 options has as powerful an effect, and in some cases a more powerful effect, on their subsequent enrollments in mathematics, science, and the full set of college prep courses as it does for their English fluent peers.

DISSERTATION GRANTS – 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://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations>.

Raising Bilingual Children: Factors in Maintaining a Heritage Language

JANET OH, UCLA

GRANT #01-06DG-LA

This study examined the language development of linguistic minority preschool-age children in a longitudinal study, with a focus on heritage language maintenance and loss. Families in the study came from Korean American immigrant backgrounds.

In terms of predictors of Korean language maintenance, the study focused on the following factors: heritage language support in the home, positive attitudes toward the heritage language, and heritage culture support.

Overall, children showed development in both Korean and English in both types of preschool programs (bilingual vs. all-English) over the course of a year, with few differences. There was some limited evidence that children in all-English programs might be exceeding children in bilingual programs in English expressive vocabulary development, while trailing them in Korean expressive vocabulary development.

Results indicate that Korean language support reliably predicts children's continued use of Korean. These results suggest that linguistic minority parents can influence their children's maintenance of the heritage language in important ways.

Literacy Learning in a Bilingual Classroom for Deaf Students: Negotiating Between New Zealand Sign Language and English

Yael Biederman, UC Berkeley

GRANT #02-02CY-02DG-B

This dissertation examines instructional practices and learning processes of participants in a bilingual classroom for deaf students.

The purpose of the study was to examine ways deaf students who participate in a bilingual learning context use the sign language and other linguistic resources as tools to mediate reading and writing development. An additional objective was to characterize teaching practices that facilitated the observed deaf children's bilingual language acquisition and literacy learning.

Analysis of the students' participation in reading and writing events demonstrated that deaf learners use a natural sign language interpersonally, intrapersonally, and as an intermediate link in the

process of developing literacy. These findings suggest that a sign language can be used to mediate the learning of a written language despite modality differences between the language of face-to-face communication and the language of print.

Collectively, the findings from this study highlight the importance of a bilingual learning context in which communication and instruction are in a natural sign language and in which deaf learners are encouraged to use the sign language and other linguistic resources as tools to mediate literacy development.

The Writing Development of Chinese and Vietnamese Newcomer Students

ANN LOI GO, UC DAVIS

GRANT #02-02CY-05DG-D

This one-year case study investigated the writing development of six Chinese and Vietnamese newcomer students in fifth and sixth grades to address the question: What are the patterns of writing development of recent immigrant students?

Quantitative text analysis and genre-based text analysis using the framework of systemic functional linguistics were used to analyze the students' writing. Contextual factors affecting these students' writing development were investigated through classroom observation, home visits, and interviews with students, teachers, and parents.

Students who showed more progress in their writing had comparatively more schooling in their primary language and were avid readers. Individually, the students used different strategies and had different attitudes toward writing. Differences were related to students' self-image, primary language literacy and access to academic resources. Other contextual factors that played important roles in writing development included teachers' writing instructions, primary language support, and family literacy practice.

In summary, this study identified the language resources these recent immigrant students used to meet the demands of writing in English and showed how factors in their learning environments affected their literacy development.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

2004 UC LMRI CONFERENCE

MAY 7-8, 2004 IN SANTA BARBARA, CA



** Conference theme will focus on Family Literacy **

** Of special interest: Spanish language panel * Call for presenters scheduled for Fall 2003 **

** Conference facilities currently being negotiated **

** Updates on the UC LMRI web site **

LMRI Works with California CELDT Committee

Three members of the UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee, **Russell Rumberger**, **Robin Scarcella**, and **Barbara Merino**, now serve on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) advisory committee. At its last meeting, held on June 20, 2003, the committee discussed how to define two annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) for English learners for California to meet the requirements of Title III of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB):

1. Gains in the percentage of students meeting annual CELDT objectives;
2. Annual increases in the percentage of students attaining English language proficiency as demonstrated by the CELDT.

Unlike Title I, where schools are held accountable, in Title III the State is going to hold Local Education Authorities (LEAs) accountable.

Callahan Awarded Post-Doctoral Fellowships

Rebecca Callahan, who recently completed her Ph.D. in Education at UC Davis, was awarded two post-doctoral fellowships, one from UC LMRI and one from AERA with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences (IES). Because the AERA fellowship provides funding for two or three years, Dr. Callahan has elected to accept the AERA fellowship rather than the one from UC LMRI. Dr. Callahan will carry out her post-doctoral research with Dr. Russell Rumberger at UC Santa Barbara beginning in September 2003. Her post-doctoral fellowship will include a detailed analysis of statewide CELDT data and English learner high school transcripts.



Rebecca Callahan

Dr. Callahan's dissertation research, under the direction of Dr. Patricia Gándara, focused on the impact of track placement, as opposed to language proficiency, on the academic achievement of high school age English learners. She is especially interested in long-term English learners, those students who have been in U.S. schools seven years or more. Prior to returning to the university for graduate study, Dr. Callahan worked as a bilingual educator, first in the early elementary grades, then at the secondary level. Her previous work has been with the UC LMRI Education Policy Center at UC Davis.

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.

* * *

Patricia Gándara recently became a Co-Director of the **Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)**, a policy group focused on a broad range of California education issues. This spring and summer the Policy Center has been pursuing a number of projects in collaboration with PACE, including an investigation of English learners and instructional time, and a study of these students in the state's community colleges.

The Center is also continuing work on the responses of teachers of English learners to policy change. **Dr. Julie Maxwell-Jolly** interviewed more than forty teachers at the last conference of the **California Association for Bilingual Education**. The **UCLA Cesar Chavez Research Center** provided assistance with the design and implementation of the interviews. Questions about teachers' post-Proposition 227 classroom experiences and job mobility will provide background information for the design of a statewide survey of bilingual teachers.

An ongoing Policy Center activity is the monitoring of the effect of California government actions on English learner education. This spring and summer all government sectors were focused on the budget with a resulting lull in legislative activity. Initial budget analysis indicates that state funds for the education of English learners have not been significantly reduced; however, the **California Department of Education (CDE)** is currently conducting a more detailed investigation of budget changes, the results of which will be available in the coming weeks.

* * *

Contact Patricia Gándara for more information on the Center:
pcgandara@ucdavis.edu

UC LMRI Newsletter Staff

Russell W. Rumberger Editor-in-Chief
Beverly Leaney Publications Editor

UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee

Adalberto Aguirre Jr UC Riverside
Margaret Gibson UC Santa Cruz
Kris Gutiérrez UC Los Angeles
Carolyn Huie Hofstetter UC Berkeley
Paula Levin UC San Diego
Barbara Merino UC Davis
Giorgio Perissinotto UC Santa Barbara
David J. Sánchez UC San Francisco
Robin Scarcella UC Irvine

* * *

Russell W. Rumberger (Director) UC Santa Barbara
Patricia Gándara (UC LMRI Education Policy Center) UC Davis
Dante Noto UC Office of the President

UC LMRI Staff

Russell W. Rumberger Director
Valery N. Rivera Management Services Officer
Beverly Leaney Editor/Web Designer/Events Coordinator

How to Contact Us

Email

Letters to the Editor: russ@lmri.ucsb.edu
General Correspondence: lmri@lmri.ucsb.edu

Phone

805.893.2250

Fax

805.893.8673

Web

<http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu>

The UC LMRI Newsletter is published quarterly and is available for distribution by electronic subscription to interested parties. Visit our web site to subscribe or make any name/address changes or corrections to your current subscription.

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

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Santa Barbara, CA
Permit No. 104

Inside This Issue

- Teacher Researcher Studies of ELs
- Three Dissertation Reports
- New LMRI-bound Post-Doc