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FINAL GRANT REPORT

How Culture and Language Practices Shape Storytelling of Young Children

Narrating, or story telling, is a universal way in which humans use language to make sense of both new and routine experiences in their daily lives. Children learn to engage with the world around them through their everyday social interactions with their family members, caregivers, and other community members, and those interactions are mediated by language—often in the form of narratives. Narrating also connects oral language with the development of literacy skills and success in learning to read.

A longitudinal examination of young children's narratives allows a unique glimpse at the intersection of language and culture in children's social and cognitive development. The narrative structure, content, and collaborative style between children and adults demonstrates cultural values in relationships between children and adults, folk philosophies on learning and education, and connections between home and school language. In addition, children's expertise in oral narratives enables them to simultaneously attend to linguistic form and function as well as the process of meaning-making—an inherent skill in both narrative production and literacy acquisition.

Current study

This study examined narrative development in a group of 71 Latino children, ages three to seven, from bilingual households. The primary goals were to describe normative developmental patterns in children's narratives, and to investigate variations in narrative development related to participation in cultural communities and their preferred family language practices. Cultural communities were defined by immigration experiences and family context, while family language practices were defined by reading and storytelling activities, language usage preferences, and maternal beliefs about language. Data for this study came from assessments, interviews, and observations conducted in the children's homes when they were 36 months, 54 months, and 78 months old.

The study found that the overall complexity in the children's narratives in Spanish and in English—as defined both by story structure and linguistic features, as well as their productive and receptive language—were on par with normative samples of English-speaking European-American children, with a pattern of becoming more complex over time. Nonetheless, there was considerable variation in children's narratives, which were partially explained by looking at participation in cultural communities and their language practices.

Children in families with extended family networks in the United States demonstrated more complex grammatical development at three

years than did children in families isolated from an extended family network. Children living in homes using both Spanish and English had lower initial scores on narrative complexity than their peers in monolingual homes; by first grade, however, these differences were no longer evident. Children in Spanish-dominant families had slower initial growth in grammatical development than children in English-dominant families; but by entry to elementary school, grammar and productive language capabilities 'caught-up' to the normal range. This resulted from an increased opportunity to practice using two languages simultaneously, which led to more complex narratives requiring more complex grammar.

The main finding of this study is that children's language development has more to do with the cultural community in which their families are living, and the everyday language practices within those communities, than with ethnicity, language, or income. These practices are often not clearly defined and may change over time.

Implications for researchers and educators

Research on narrative development has important implications for researchers and educators. Understanding language development in relation to cultural beliefs and practices is important for designing effective learning environments for young children. Home language practices shape language and literacy development. Children whose practices more closely resemble those of the school community may experience less difficulty in literacy development than children with other kinds of home language experiences.

Because demographics are changing, we need more research on language socialization and the connection to the development of academic language skills. Given the link between narratives and social and linguistic development, researchers are now arguing for the inclusion of narrative assessments in evaluations and intervention programs for children at risk for language or literacy difficulties.

The findings from this study further support this argument by demonstrating that language development goes beyond standard academic language, and that children's narrative development is an essential link in the connection between oral language and literacy development.

—Alison Gallwey Wishard

This cover story is based on the final report for UC LMRI Research Grant #05-04CY-01DG-LA. The abstract and complete report are available on the UC LMRI web site.

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Research Grants Awarded

The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee met in Oakland in October and reviewed the six proposal submissions—2 Individual and 4 Dissertation—received in the October 2005 Call for Proposals. Subsequently, one Dissertation Research Grant for \$15,000 was awarded, while one other was given the conditional option to resubmit and may be eligible for future funding.

DISSERTATION GRANT AWARD

Development Research on Early Intervention to Prevent Poor Reading Comprehension for English Language Learners

PI: EMILY J. SOLARI, UCSB
DISSERTATION GRANT #06-05CY-03DG-SB
FUNDED: OCTOBER 2005

I propose a two-year project in reading, specifically to develop an effective method of continuous progress monitoring and intervention for Spanish-speaking English learners (ELs) in kindergarten who are at risk for developing poor reading comprehension and later identification as being learning disabled.

Although a large body of scientific evidence now exists to support early instruction to prevent reading disabilities, this literature largely focuses almost exclusively on early acquisition of word reading skills. Virtually no literature exists that similarly demonstrates effective early interventions for ELs that specifically targets later reading comprehension.

The proposed research will address this dearth of rigorous empirical research by conducting a randomized, alternate treatment control group experiment to test effects of intensive instruction that targets specific precursors to reading comprehension in a sample of ELs who may be at risk for later reading failure.

Conference on Early Educational Experiences of Language Minority Children

New research findings from analyses using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and the National Household Education Surveys Program

January 27, 2006 • Sacramento, CA

Co-sponsors:

- UC Linguistic Minority Research Institute
- UC Davis School of Education
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
- National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST)

For more information please visit:
www.cresst.org/lmc

Completed Research Grants

UC LMRI received final reports from six completed Research Grants thus far in fiscal year 2005-06. Abstracts from four of those are featured in this issue—including the cover story.

The final report abstract from Richard Figueroa (below) is the last of the eleven final reports from completed Research Grants received in fiscal year 2004-05.

FINAL GRANT REPORT ABSTRACTS

Can Reading Intervention Replace English Language Development? A Case Study at the Secondary Level

PI: RICHARD FIGUEROA, UC DAVIS
TEACHER GRANT #03-03CY-02TG-D
COMPLETED: APRIL 2005

In response to federal and state accountability efforts focused on reading, California secondary schools are beginning to replace traditional English Language Development (ELD) curricula with reading intervention programs such as High Point (HP). This study utilized data from one school site's implementation of the High Point Program to analyze the impact of this structured, research-based reading intervention program on the English language development and academic achievement of secondary school English Learners (ELs). The school site in question replaced its' traditional ELD program with this reading intervention program.

Quantitative results indicate that there is little significant difference in the performance of students within the HP Program by HP level, grade (9th through 12th), and length of U.S. residency. Between HP and non-HP English learners—in terms of English language acquisition and academic achievement—non-HP ELs generally performed better than HP ELs.

Results of this study may have limited generalizability across other HP implementation efforts. The results do raise the possibility, however, that substituting a "research-based" English literacy program with English learners may not be an effective substitute to programs that operationalize California's English Language Development Standards.

Building and Supporting a Validity Argument for a Standards-Based Classroom Assessment of English Proficiency

PI: LORENA LLOSA, UCLA
DISSERTATION GRANT #04-04CY-03DG-LA
COMPLETED: JULY 2005

This study investigates validity issues related to the use of the English Language Development (ELD) Classroom Assessment, a standards-based assessment of English proficiency used in a large urban school district in California to make high-stakes decisions about students.

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which scores on the ELD Classroom Assessment can be interpreted as

indicators of English proficiency as defined by the California ELD standards.

Verbal protocol reports of teachers while scoring the ELD Classroom Assessment shed some light on the quantitative findings. They revealed that the scores on the ELD Classroom Assessment reflect more than just students' English proficiency; scores also reflect teachers' interpretations of the standards, teachers' interpretation of the scoring criteria, students' personalities and behavior, pressure to advance students to the next level, and teachers' beliefs about assessment.

The study concludes that despite inconsistencies in teachers' scoring, the ELD Classroom Assessment measures English proficiency as defined by the California ELD Standards, does so consistently over time, and captures student progress. Classroom assessments such as the ELD Classroom Assessment have the potential to be useful assessment instruments both for accountability and to promote student learning. In order to be used more effectively, professional development is needed as well as an explicit alignment between the curriculum and the ELD Standards.

“Doublethinking” Reading: The Social and Political Consequences of Reform on the Repertoires of English Learners

PI: MARIANA (MARY ANN) PACHECO, *UCLA*
DISSERTATION GRANT #03-03CY-04DG-LA
COMPLETED: JULY 2005

In this case study I utilized cultural-historical perspectives to examine the effects of convergent educational reforms centered on language, reading, and accountability on the learning opportunities of English Learners at a state-identified 'successful' school.

A major finding of this study was that the new accountability framework the state uses to define 'successful readers' narrowed teachers' and administrators' literacy and language goals for English learners.

Through focused analyses, I also concluded that the new reform agenda neglected the academic and social needs of those students who least met the terms of the new accountability framework. Moreover, these vulnerable students had increased difficulties in classrooms where teachers lacked the expertise to organize literacy learning in ways that created opportunities to learn, therefore, raised concerns about the long-term social and political consequences of policies that neglected to expand the repertoires of English Learners in public schools.

Helping Content Area Teachers Work with Academic Language: Promoting English Language Learners' Literacy in History

PI: MARY SCHLEPPPEGRELL, *UC DAVIS*
INDIVIDUAL GRANT #03-03CY-06IG-D
COMPLETED: JULY 2005

This research grew out of collaborative work with the California History-Social Science Project (<http://csmmp.ucop.edu/chssp/>). The goal was to identify knowledge about language that can enable teachers to help middle and secondary school English language

learners (ELLs) develop literacy in history.

The study suggests that teachers can support ELLs' language development and learning of grade-level content in mainstream history classrooms by:

- Focusing on the patterns of language needed to write account and explanation texts before arguments, helping students develop the ability to make a claim and support it with evidence;
- Presenting and modeling language that constructs effective expository texts;
- When responding to ELL writing, focusing on the meaning the student is trying to express rather than on the errors that will inevitably appear.

This study provides specific information that teachers can use to focus on language issues relevant for writing the kinds of texts typically assigned by history teachers.

LMRI NEWS

UC LMRI Unveils Redesigned Web Site

On October 1, 2005 UC LMRI debuted its redesigned web site. The new look includes a more comprehensive drop-down menu for easier site navigation, easier accessibility to non-LMRI content, and several new features, including new pages for the Education Policy Center, Resources, and a Spanish language resource page: En Español. Visit UC LMRI on the web at: <http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu>.

2004-05 Annual Report Released

UC LMRI has just released its most recent Annual Report. This year's report is in a new condensed, four-page, full-color format. The report and appendix, with detailed information and historical tables, is available on the UC LMRI web site.

2006 UC LMRI Research Grants Call for Proposals Deadline: February 1, 2006

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.

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.

The Education Policy Center was involved in a number of activities in the fall quarter:

- The first 2005-06 meeting of the North State Bilingual Network was held in Davis on September 29, 2005. Education Rights Attorney **Mary Hernandez** discussed the effects of NCLB accountability on the testing of English learners.
- **The Davis Joint Unified School District (DJUSD)** commissioned the Policy Center to do an evaluation of the English learners program in the district. The objective is to strengthen services provided to these students and develop a template for looking at similar issues in other school districts.
- The Policy Center is in the initial stages of conducting a study of the experiences and outcomes of

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AND
HIGHER EDUCATION”**

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Latino students at the California Community Colleges. We hope to identify predictors of successful retention and transition to 4-year colleges that will help increase degree completion among this population that is disproportionately EL.

- The Policy Center is providing background assistance to an effort led by a dozen school districts in California to align state testing policy with NCLB provisions. The objective of this work is to provide more valid and useful test information for both the state and the teachers who teach these students.

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Reports in This Issue

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

Complete copies of UCLMRI-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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