

# UC Berkeley

## Newsletters

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## The Growing Achievement Gap for California's English Learners

California's school accountability system relies primarily on a single norm-referenced test: the ninth edition of the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT9), which is administered each spring to students in grades 2 through 11, including all English learners. The state uses changes in SAT9 scores to reward and sanction schools as well as to track student progress. Local newspapers report changes for individual schools, praising schools that raise their test scores and criticizing those that don't. Changes in SAT9 scores for English learners have also been used by the media as evidence that Proposition 227, which drastically curtailed bilingual programs, has improved their achievement. For example, an August 2001 story in the *New York Times*, which was cited in 25 other major U.S. newspapers, reported that as a result of the state's "cold bath" approach to instruction in English, English learners "are improving in reading and other subjects at often striking rates."

There are several problems with using test scores of English learners to gauge their academic progress and to evaluate the effectiveness of educational reforms. The most serious problem is that testing students in a language in which they are not yet proficient provides neither a valid nor a useful indication of their subject matter knowledge. According to a recent report on high-stakes testing by the National Academy of Sciences, "when students are not proficient in the language of the assessment (English), their scores on a test in English will not accurately reflect their knowledge of the subject being assessed." Moreover, any test administered IN English, is to some extent a test OF English. As a result, positive changes in test scores over time can give the inaccurate impression that students have gained subject matter knowledge when, in fact, they may have simply gained proficiency in English.

Another problem is that positive changes in test scores of English learners at the same grade level over time can distort the progress of these students relative to English-only students over time. For example, an August 2001 press release from the California State Department of Education reported that reading test scores for 2nd graders increased by 11 percent

between 1998 and 2001. This statement was based on figures that show the percent of students scoring at or above the 50th percentile increased from 40 to 51 over this period (see Table 1).

Grade	1998	1999	2000	2001	Grade-level Gain	Cohort Gain
2	40	44	49	51	11	
3	38	41	44	46	8	
4	40	41	45	47	7	
5	41	42	44	45	4	5

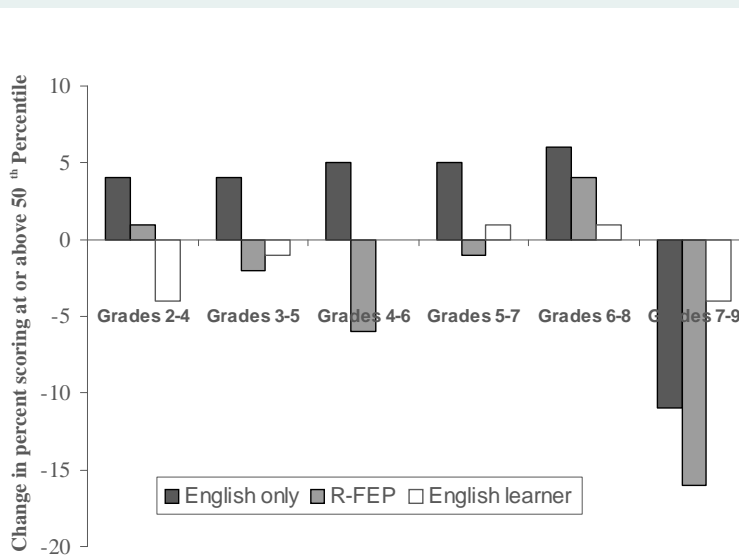
SOURCE: *California Department of Education (2001), Press Release, Retrieved February 10, 2002 from: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/news/releases2001/re145.asp>*

Research has shown that annual test scores are highly volatile and thus provide an inaccurate measure of the progress that schools make in raising student achievement. A more stable and suitable method is to compare the progress of a particular cohort of students over time. The same state test score data that showed an 11 percent increase in grade 2 reading scores (actually it was an 11 *percentage* point increase), also showed that the percent of students in the grade 2 cohort who scored above the 50th percentile in reading increased a more modest 5 percentage points, from 40 percent in 1998 to 45 in 2001 (Table 1).

Using this same method, we examined the change in reading and math test scores for successive cohorts of English learners, former English learners who were reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (R-FEP), and English-only students between 1999 and 2001 (data were not available for 1998).

We included R-FEP students because, over time, an increasing number of English learners become proficient in English and

**Figure 1**  
**Change in the Percent of California Students Scoring at or Above the 50<sup>th</sup> Percentile in SAT9 Reading by Language Classification, 1998-2001**



SOURCE: Data retrieved February 7, 2002 from: <http://www.eddataonline.com/star/>

are reclassified as fluent English speakers. Therefore the number of English learners tends to decrease among older grade cohorts while the number of R-FEP students tends to increase.

The results reveal that English-only students made substantially more improvement in both reading and math than English learners over the last three years. In terms of reading, for example, English-only students enrolled in grades 2 through 5 in 1999 improved their reading test scores by 4 to 5 percentage points relative to the national average over a three year period, while English learners' reading scores declined for students in grades 2 and 3, stayed even for students in grade 4, and improved by only 1 percentage point for students in the grade 5 cohort (Figure 1). Reclassified students didn't do any better. The grade 7 and grade 8 cohorts among all three language groups showed substantial declines in reading scores over the three year period, with reclassified students showing even greater declines than English-only students, but English learners showing only modest declines. Math scores showed similar changes.

A more fundamental problem in California is the absence of a valid system of accountability to chart the academic progress of these students. Some English learners come to the US as immigrants with already well-developed academic skills, others come from far less advantaged backgrounds either in the US or abroad. It is important to know the skills that English learners bring to school in order to tailor instruction to their needs, and it is important to assess them in a manner that allows us to measure their progress in both English and in academic subjects.

Finally, studies of several state-wide testing programs have found that scores on standardized tests can be expected to increase for all students for several years after the initial launch of a new test because students perform better as schools and teachers begin to adapt to and prepare for the test. Indeed, California test scores seem to be following this pattern—the largest increases appeared immediately after the test was introduced and have since flattened out. California also introduced a number of statewide reforms during this period, including class size reduction in the lower elementary grades. Thus, it is hard to know what accounts

for the initial rise in California's test scores since the SAT9 was launched in 1998.

Whatever the reasons behind California's increases in SAT9 scores, the improvements do not seem to be benefiting all students equally. In particular, English learners do not appear to be showing the same improvements in test scores as students from English-only backgrounds. In other words, the evidence suggests that the achievement gap between English learners and English-only students, contrary to public pronouncements, is widening.

— Patricia Gándara and Russell W. Rumberger

## UC LMRI Awards 2002 Research Grants

The UC LMRI Faculty Steering Committee awarded seven research grants in four program areas for 2002-03 totaling \$157,643. The first program funded two Individual Research Grants totaling \$49,944. The second program funded three Dissertation Research Grants totaling \$32,699. The third program funded one Collaborative Research Grant for \$50,000. The fourth program funded one Teacher Research Grant totaling \$25,000.

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

## DISSERTATION GRANTS

### **Second Language Literacy and Identity Formation on the Internet: The Case of Chinese Immigrant Youth In the US**

WAN SHUN EVA LAM, UC BERKELEY

This dissertation investigates the kinds of literacy and identity practices that are constructed on the Internet among Chinese immigrant youth in the United States who are in the process of learning English as a second language. Through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and discourse analysis of the electronic documents produced by adolescent Chinese immigrants who communicate in English with their overseas peers via homepages, on-line chat, and electronic mail, I examine the social and material contexts for second language reading and writing, and the relation between identity and literacy development in networked computer environments. The many and varied opportunities for ESL learners to voluntarily engage in literacy experiences on the Internet have not been the subject of in-depth educational research. The aim of this project, therefore, is to explore how second language literacy is related to the discursive construction of identity as writing enters the electronic age and new forms of social networking emerge through Web-based communication.

### **Literacy Learning In A Bilingual Classroom For Deaf Students**

Yael BIEDERMAN, UC BERKELEY

This study examines the processes by which deaf students in a bilingual program use sign language, their first language, to learn to read and write in a second language. Documenting and understanding the strategies deaf students employ to learn a written language through a visual-gestural language, will provide insights into this little understood area and will inform the development of effective teaching practices. Data are collected and analyzed using methods of ethnographic field research. Students from a classroom at a bilingual school for the deaf in New Zealand are observed and videotaped three times per week engaging in literacy activities. The duration of the study is one school year. Students are also observed at home using sign language and written language with their families. Additionally, parents and teaching staff are interviewed to discuss deaf children's language and literacy learning. By studying deaf children's interaction with print in the classroom and home settings, I hope to highlight the diverse ways that deaf children use sign language to become readers and writers. This in-depth ethnography of the everyday enactment of bilingual education for deaf students can provide new insights into deaf children's literacy learning and help improve historically low educational outcomes.

### **Predictors of English Reading Comprehension Abilities in Native Spanish-speaking Children: The Role of Lower Order Cognitive Skills**

GAYANE MESCHYAN, UC SANTA BARBARA

Language minority students are more likely to lag behind their monolingual English-speaking peers on measures of reading comprehension skills. Good reading skills are necessary for academic success and for maintaining students' motivation in academic pursuits. Hence, we may conclude that language minority children are at greater risk for poor academic performance and higher drop out rates. Native Spanish-speaking children comprise the largest language minority group. The purpose of the present study is to identify the predictors of English reading comprehension success in native Spanish-speaking fourth and fifth graders. In addition, it investigates the relationship between these children's native (Spanish) and second (English) language skills. The study uses confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling to address these issues. The results of this study have the potential to make important theoretical contributions to the second language acquisition literature, while making practical contributions to how native Spanish-speaking children are taught English language reading skills.

## COLLABORATIVE GRANTS

### **Relationships Among Literacy and Cognitive Functioning Measures in Monolingual and Bilingual Children at or not at Risk for Learning Disabilities**

H. LEE SWANSON, UC RIVERSIDE

AND

MICHAEL GERBER, UCSB

This study addresses two theoretical issues: (1) whether the performance of monolingual and bilingual children at risk for learning disabilities share a common phonological core problem and (2) whether various levels of cognitive processes related to literacy operate within the child's primary language or reflect operations within the second language system. The sample includes monolingual and bilingual children at or not at risk for learning disabilities. The proposed research is a follow-up study of approximately 120 first grade children tested individually and in small groups on a battery of cognitive and literacy measure. Follow-up testing on individual and group measures are proposed for grades 2 and 3. The proposal has three purposes: (1) evaluate the stability of cognitive processing, literacy, and classification measures in monolingual and bilingual children who are at risk for learning disabilities; (2) evaluate the psychometric properties of the cognitive and classification measures; and (3) measure growth in cognition and literacy performance. The findings of this study have direct application to the accurate identification of children at risk for learning disabilities for samples that vary in Spanish and English proficiency.

## TEACHER GRANTS

### **A Collaborative Partnership: An Investigation of the Effects of Implementation of Bilingual Cultural Pedagogy and Authentic Assessment on Deaf Children's Literacy, Year 2**

TOM HUMPHRIES, UC SAN DIEGO

In the second year of this investigation, we seek to strengthen the established partnership among elementary administrators and teachers of deaf and hard of hearing children across three local public school districts in San Diego County, and California School for the Deaf, Riverside with educator-researchers from the University of California, San Diego Teacher Education Program. The teachers, administrators and educator-researchers will collaborate, investigate and share findings with each other about the implementation and effects of bilingual cultural pedagogy and authentic assessment on deaf children's literacy performance.

The goals of the project are: (1) to strengthen the existing community of educator-researchers including practitioners and UCSD Teacher Education faculty; (2) to build the capacity of teacher leadership at each represented school site and ensure administrative support and understanding; (3) to study the effects of how bilingual/cultural pedagogy joined with an authentic assessment furthers the literacy achievement of deaf and hard of hearing children; and (4) to describe for a wider audience teaching practices that improve literacy achievement for deaf and hard of hearing children by presenting at local, state and national conferences.

## INDIVIDUAL GRANTS

### **Explanatory Models of Mental Health Problems Among Cambodian Children and Parents**

TAMARA DALEY, UCLA

Child mental health has increasingly gained recognition as a critical area of national focus, with 15-20% of children in the United States estimated to experience an emotional, behavioral or developmental disorder. Children of refugees are at an even greater risk than the general population. In addition to high rates of poverty, these linguistic minority children also must attempt to maintain and balance multiple cultures, a process that often leads to intergenerational conflicts, acculturative stress, and parent-child role conflicts (Evans & Lee, 1998).

A primary goal of this study is to examine the communication between Cambodian mothers and children as it relates to their explanations of mental health problems, both among children who have been referred for mental health services and those who have not. Approximately 80 mother-child pairs will be interviewed in their homes using a semi-structured tool called the EMIC, and the data obtained from this measure will be used in conjunction with information about language use,

openness of communication, and presence of symptoms to provide an initial understanding of the relationship between these factors. It is hoped that the results of this study will be of specific use in facilitating mental health services and policy within the Long Beach Unified School District, a district serving the largest community of Cambodian refugees in the United States.

### **The Role of Parent and Student Perceptions in the Educational Achievement of Language Minority Students: A Qualitative Approach**

ROSS PARKE, UC RIVERSIDE

The goal of the project is to gain a better understanding of the antecedents of educational attainment in Mexican American students. We propose to collect supplemental qualitative data on 8th grade Mexican American students and their parents who are participating in an ongoing longitudinal study of economic stress. We will examine possible discrepancies between parent and child values and the role of student perceptions of their school's appreciation of cultural diversity, with special attention to attitudes toward language minority students. The proposed project will expand ongoing quantitative data collection with qualitative data to illuminate some of the processes accounting for variability in the educational outcomes of Mexican American students and provide guidelines for social policy and preventative intervention efforts on behalf Mexican American students.

## DISSERTATION GRANT REPORT

### **Linguistic and Communicative Aspects of American Sign Language Development**

REYNA BETH LINDERT, UC BERKELEY

With the establishment of bilingual education programs for deaf children in the United States, an increasing number of hearing parents are learning American Sign Language (ASL). This study begins characterizing the language used by this new, unique, and understudied population. Five deaf children (ages 2 through 4 at the start of the project) and their mothers (three hearing, two deaf late-learners of ASL) engaged in two tasks designed to elicit production of ASL "classifiers" and comprehension of ASL spatial descriptions. The children also engaged in these tasks with a native ASL-using deaf adult.

Quantitative results for maternal production indicate, for example, that hearing and deaf mothers use "classifiers" to a similar degree, although the deaf mothers produce a larger variety of "classifiers" than do the hearing mothers. Qualitative analyses of the errors produced by hearing and deaf mothers provide an in depth understanding of the process by which

complex ASL morphology is learned and used in novel contexts. These findings indicate that hearing mothers (like deaf mothers) are able to use linguistically complex ASL signs (i.e., “classifiers”) when communicating with their deaf children.

Results in terms of children’s comprehension indicate that children understand objects named in spatial descriptions at least half of the time; they have more difficulty comprehending descriptions of relationships between objects. This is especially true for children from hearing families when engaging in the task with their mothers. These findings indicate that deaf children are capable of comprehending non-fluent parental input; however, they are better able to understand some messages when provided by a fluent signer.

Finally, in terms of the children’s production of “classifiers”, quantitative results indicate, for example, that all children are able to use “classifiers”. However, older children produce these forms more frequently than younger children. Qualitative analyses of the children’s patterns of response and unconventional forms provide an indication of the processes by which complex ASL morphology is acquired and used. These findings indicate that children from deaf and hearing families can use complex ASL signs appropriately, although with varying degrees of conventionality and frequency.

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### **UCSB SMALL RESEARCH GRANT REPORT**

#### **The English-only Movement: A Communication Analysis of Changing Linguistic Vitality**

HOWARD GILES, UC SANTA BARBARA

AND

VALERIE ELIZABETH BARKER, SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

The considerable growth in language minority populations in recent years has been matched by an increase in language policies encapsulated by the English-only movement. Using vitality theory as a framework, this three-part study investigated if support for English-only policies among Anglos is related to growing Latino group vitality (salience in the population, social institutions, and increased power/status) and the presence of Spanish in the linguistic landscape. The study investigated these issues on three different populations: members of the general population in Santa Barbara, and two samples of undergraduates from the University of California, Santa Barbara. As predicted, Anglo-Americans’ perceptions of a growing Latino vitality (e.g., increasing demographic presence) together with a decreasing Anglo vitality, a strong within-group language identity, and feeling “completely American” were related to both support for English-only policies and (to a lesser extent) social limitations on immigrants. Contrary to expectations, less contact with Spanish in the linguistic landscape was associated with greater support for

English-only policies. Older participants were much more likely to support English-only policies, while those with a higher level of education and those of professional status were less likely to support such policies.

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### **NEW! PROPOSITION 227 PAGE ON LMRI WEBSITE**

In June 1998, the voters of California passed Proposition 227. Because of the widespread interest in this issue and its obvious relevance to the schooling of English learners, both in California and elsewhere, we have created a web page (<http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu/prop227>) to provide up-to-date information on this topic. The information is divided into three categories:

- Research (information based on the analysis of data with no judgment about the quality of data or analysis)
- Commentary (discussion and opinions)
- Related Links

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### **NEW! UC LMRI POSTDOC**

Start September 2002! See our web site for further details. (<http://www.lmri.ucsb.edu>)

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## *UC LMRI's 15th Annual Conference*

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**Lily Wong Fillmore, UC Berkeley**

*and*

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**INTRODUCING:**



UC LMRI's new Student Assistant **Esperanza Martínez** took over in December 2001 for Maria Zamora, who graduated from UCSB and is now working at Ohlone College.

Born in the southeast state of Michoacán, Mexico, Esperanza is a double major at UCSB, in Spanish and Latin American Studies. Her father, Ramon, was a farmworker in the strawberry fields and her mother, Magdalena, a housewife. Esperanza took classes in Mexico-U.S. Relations while studying abroad at the U.N.A.M. in Mexico City and is looking forward to a career in International Relations after graduation in 2002.

During her free time she enjoys writing and she'd like one day to publish a book. While at UC LMRI she hopes to fine tune her computer skills while assisting the LMRI faculty and staff.

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